Gold Rush

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Gold Rush

by EarthsickWithoutYou

Summary

Season 1 if Will Graham thought well of himself and enjoyed his life. When he meets Hannibal, he can't resist flirting heavily and beginning to court the irresistible, elegant therapist. However, a confident, smooth Will Graham is an overwhelming prospect to Hannibal, to say the least. Can Will get past Hannibal's defenses? One thing's for sure, Will isn't giving up: he's obsessed.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

The bone crush

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Part One: I almost jump in

Special Agent Will Graham presented Jack Crawford with numerous unique virtues and concerns. Lest those concerns blossom to full-on worries, Jack was eager to compel his best agent to undergo a psychiatric examination, but Will was an escape artist, well-schooled at evading Jack's polite requests and warning looks. If Jack was going to achieve the level of certainty he needed regarding Will's mental stability, he would have to resort to his own form of trickery.

He just couldn't reconcile for himself how anyone, even a man as brilliant, confident and capable as Will Graham, could accomplish quite so much on a daily basis, effortlessly (so it seemed, at least) balancing a teaching schedule with heavy, demanding profiling for the Behavioral Crimes division, always appearing so perfectly calm and friendly, unbothered by diving headfirst into the most horrible serial killers' inner worlds, emerging with the answers gleaming like gold in his hands after little more than a few minutes spent closing his eyes while immersed in the crime scenes.

Certainly, there were a few outward symptoms of potential humanity, limitations to Will's smooth veneer. For one thing, the man had the dress sense of a dog-eared LL Bean catalogue from the late 1990's and the tendency to blab on about his hobbies, the seven dogs for God's sake (when did he have time to take care of them?!), fishing, it was mildly infuriating. Even Will's personal pastimes sounded like excellently healthy ways to cope with harsh and potentially deeply draining work, and *no one* could be that healthy -- not doing this work, not in the long-term.

Will did not possess the ability Jack saw in Katz, Zeller and Price, for example, the way the squints could just toss off the day's work when needed and revert to casual small talk; the ghosts of the cases always lingered in Will's eyes even when he spoke the lightest. It *got* to him, the killing they waded into, the gruesome gore and terrible loss of it all, it ran through Will's bloodstream, but the agent seemed to metabolize it better than Jack.

Was *that* what this was really all about? Jack cringed to think this was about envy, but that piece of the puzzle was undeniable. How *did* Will manage to feel these crimes so deeply, solve them at a faster rate than any agent in the unit's history, and seem to be thoroughly okay?

Jack brought the demons home with him every night, it affected his moods, put space sometimes between him and Bella that made him hate himself. Did he want to protect the world from the consequences if Will's well-preserved sanity suddenly split open under the crushing blows of these awful murder cases? Did he want a better idea for himself, to know if Will *was* genuinely that cool and competent and unfazed, *how* this was achieved? Yes, he was

looking for just as many answers to his own problems as to Will's, and that annoyed him, but there it was.

Best to get this over with so he could rest at ease, knowing that his most talented agent was in a good headspace, could be trusted in the long term, and could provide him with insight about how to *do* this everyday without corrosive and irreversible damage to one's inner peace and home life. Jack had never even suspected someone on the profiling end of things could personify this coolness; it made sense for the forensic experts to maintain better boundaries; they dealt with the physical external manifestations of the horror; inner monstrosity was far, far worse. The killers were so much harder to forget than the victims.

Alana Bloom wasn't up to the task, that much was certain. There was some kind of strange energy between her and Will, not that they were secretly dating, surely, although he'd detected an almost compulsory, low-level flirtation at times. Two young and attractive people naturally had to notice it in each other, and their personalities would seem, objectively, well-suited. But Alana distrusted Will instinctively, was certain something wasn't quite right there or couldn't be. And Jack needed an impartial judge of Will's character to do this right. Alana might be onto something; Will's smile often seemed eerie, his dialogues which took on the voices of killers were chilling, he could be an unsettling man to share company with. But Jack wanted to hear from a brilliant analyst what they made of Will in the here and now without previously formed theories and suspicions.

He turned at last to Alana's mentor from her Georgetown days, a Dr. Hannibal Lecter to whom Alana referred him with a sigh of relief that she *wasn't* being asked to draw up a profile on Will.

Jack applied his expert skills to flatter and convince Lecter into coming to the FBI offices at Quantico to lend his assistance on the Minnesota Shrike Case -- ostensibly, at least. While it was always worthwhile to have another brilliant mind on such a complex and disturbing case, and Jack was burning with desperation to catch this son of a bitch before another innocent girl was killed, there could certainly be no harm in asking Lecter to profile Will Graham along the way.

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Another day, another notch in the headboard of Will's boring routine. He'd been restless for months, struggling against the too-neat confines of the life he had built for himself between Wolf Trap and Quantico.

For a while, the job had been a good fit for his skills and a welcome source of application for them; his mind seemed to be racing always, his intellect in constant need of fascination, his thirst for righteous justice too ravenous to be satiated only in the occasional act of grisly vigilantism in which he eagerly indulged by night.

Will wanted *something* that would light up his life with vivid meaning and excitement, but he could never seem to find it. He still loved his little rustic house with its beautiful yard so close to the woods, perfect for long, existentialist rambles, loved his darling pack of former strays, the quiet days fishing in the river or tinkering with old boat motors. There was a certain wry enjoyment he took from solving murders for the FBI while simultaneously

committing his own at every opportunity, sure. But the killers he caught for Jack weren't like him; they were sadists with selfish and destructive agendas. Will only killed despicable specimens barely worthy of the name 'human,' the vile abusers of the world who would otherwise escape condemnation, slipping through the cracks of an often impotent justice system.

The only other killer with whom Will could identify, or perhaps it was more an idolization, was the Chesapeake Ripper. The Ripper was obviously a sadist, but so many of his victims, when you looked closely enough, turned out to be just the same sort of repellent people whom Will often hunted. And the Ripper had a talent which often made Will's jaw simply drop, blue eyes widening in awe at his gorgeously macabre tableaus. The power to turn such beastly, ugly people into beautiful art...it was breathtaking. In his own hunts, Will was so often overtaken by the profound, savage thrill of the physicality, the prowess he exacted, the catharsis of causing pain to end pain...he never stopped to memorialize his acts. Perhaps he was worried that he would not be as good at covering his tracks as the ever elusive Ripper. Perhaps he could not summon the gumption to imitate the master whose work had him so often transfixed.

Even this hero worship wasn't enough to fulfill his craving for that special something that was missing from his life -- a life which on paper looked, if anything, overfull.

Maybe it was time to move on, but where was he going to build himself a better, sturdier, more advantageous situation? Why should he cave to his own irrational, even immature wanderlust?

Work was getting boring these days; he closed most cases so fast and then the next one got tossed in his lap. He loved getting evil killers off the streets, but hated the neverending, numbing repetition of it...they were all the same, just variations on a wicked theme. Except the Ripper. And except Will himself. He was far from immune to taking pride in what he did, but it never seemed to be *enough* to make him feel whole.

Recently it had occurred to him, he might simply be craving a mate. Shoving thoughts of the Ripper out of his mind under the reminder it was ridiculous to construct an imaginary romance with an unknowable mystery of a man, Will decided to try dating again for the first time in a few years. It was easy enough to find men and women who were interested in dating him, completely doable to charm them, seduce them, but then what? No one fascinated him, no one brought the intensity he sought, and then of course he had to hide his killer side, so that he felt like a strange sort of anesthetized clone of Will Graham, a little too nice and good, the real, darker version of himself screaming to be let loose.

He practically sleep-walked through the morning's lecture, yet another chance to give his "What is Your Design?" speech to the latest gaggle of FBI recruits who had started to resemble doppelgangers of themselves, the same youthful blend of ambition and cynicism. After class, he yanked his tie off and loosened his collar, annoyed to find that the headache and elevated body heat with which he'd struggled for days now had gotten even worse today. He couldn't pin it down to any one particular ailment, and over the counter cold medicine had done nothing to soothe the aching fever of his state.

He wasn't going to be able to go on much longer like this without taking care of it, and even that necessity was tiresome, but he'd get around to it. The truth was, he'd vastly prefer to stay busy tracking the Shrike rather than making himself rest in bed for a few days watching reruns of daytime soaps and game shows.

Making his way to Jack's office, he hoped this day had something better ahead for him than was readily apparent, only to have this brief unspoken wish fulfilled to a shocking extent the moment he opened the door.

Who the hell is that? Will wondered, amazed as he was introduced to the gorgeous, cultured older man with an exotic, luscious accent and an ass so round and pert, he had to force himself not to stare.

Jack introduced the man as a Dr. Hannibal Lecter, a psychiatrist who specialized in social exclusion and its role in forming criminal minds. Given that the Shrike was a cannibal, and it did not get any more "freakish" than that in the eyes of civilized, "normal" society, Will could understand why Dr. Lecter's insights might come in handy, although he was surprised Jack thought he really needed another profiler when Will was already on this case making his usual brisk progress.

Hmm. Will sank into the chair in front of Jack's desk and cupped his chin, looking with interest at the stranger's very attractive back, his broad shoulders and pretty hair in shades of light brown, blonde and silver. *Whose profile is he really working on? Jaaaaccccckkkk....*

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Hannibal was immediately intrigued by the clever young profiler, taking in Will's obviously attractive features and the strikingly sweet heat of his slight Southern accent, his quick observations and dry quips while they discussed the case. And he had absorbed all of these qualities in Will Graham's presence like a fact collector because that was how his own mind worked, coldly clinical, used to being unimpressed, never expecting any more remarkable influences than he normally encountered.

"Do you have trouble with taste?" he asked after Will called Freddie Lounds' despicable antics "tasteless."

He felt a strange thrum of nervousness which he could not quite put his finger on; he remained in front of the murder board, looking at the photos and evidence compiled there as if it held his interest when really, he was drawn with increasing fascination to converse with Will Graham.

"My thoughts are often not *tasty,*" Will said with a wry smirk which caught Hannibal's eye when he glanced back over his shoulder.

"Nor mine," he replied huskily. "No effective barriers."

"I build forts." Will took a sip of coffee; Hannibal strode over and sat beside him, carefully pondering his next observation. Jack Crawford watched them intently, curious to know what conclusions Dr. Lecter could draw based on his impression of the profiler.

And Hannibal could envision an inner world like that, the insistence on categorization to enforce some form of control over an unruly, powerful mind where impressions were otherwise so overwhelming. It was beautiful, the strength of control there, the defiant chaos always threatening to break loose beneath all that orchestrated restraint. He could relate to such a world, he lived in just such a world himself.

“Associations come quickly,” Hannibal guessed, thinking of the way his own thoughts built off of one another with organic speed, like vines racing to cover the walls of his memory palace, then slip through the windows, crawl over the halls in his tightly guarded corridors of vulnerability.

Will shrugged, “So do forts.”

“Not fond of eye contact, are you?” Hannibal was slightly frustrated, although his tone remained light.

He was frustrated with Will for not meeting his searching gaze, frustrated with himself for wanting it so badly without understanding why.

Will went off on a disgruntled tangent about why eye contact was so annoying, and Hannibal found himself charmed by the boy’s rough-hewn but smart comments, his disdain for common irritations in social interactions with which he could certainly sympathize. This boy’s direct gaze was a gift; when it landed on him fleetingly in the midst of this grumpy speech, Hannibal’s heart soared unexpectedly.

Who in the world *was* this intellectual, captivating, beautiful young man? The blue-grey eyes swimming with inscrutable mystery and a confidence he found, to his astonishment, intimidating -- the perfect jawline covered in softly bristly beard, the plush lips simply begging to be kissed until they were redly swollen and releasing countless moans, those pretty ears, the long, distracting neck and the rest of his body, slim but well-muscled, how Hannibal wanted to tear his clothes off all of a sudden and lean him over Jack’s desk, consequences be damned. Yet how, in equal measure, *he* wanted to be the one slung over the desk and fucked hard by this gorgeous, quick-witted, strong-willed profiler, he wanted all of the intensity Will had to offer, wanted it focused on him and all for himself; he wanted to let go of his own restraint and ego and be positively *wrecked* by this man.

Hannibal stared at him and blushed, utterly out of his depths. What was this terrifying sensation making butterflies swarm in his stomach while his cheeks flamed, his eyes suddenly seeming oddly wet, desire spreading tendrils of warm arousal through his whole body? What was this *feeling* which he had never experienced before but which seemed to be redefining his entire outlook on reality, without a warning, without his permission or his control? His heart slammed his ribcage as he hung on every potential reply which Will might give his next statements.

After nearly choking on a sip of subpar office coffee, Hannibal went on, “I imagine what you see and learn touches everything else in your mind. Your values and decency are present, yet shocked at your associations, appalled at your dreams.”

Will glared at him suspiciously, yet like a fool drunk on the chance to share his insights, idiotically imagining he would end up impressing the man, Hannibal plunged on, “No forts in the bone arena of your skull for things you love.”

“Actually, I’m perfectly capable of protecting the things I love, no matter how unsavory my daily ordeals,” Will retorted boldly.

He pressed his perfect, lovely hands over his knees and leveled Hannibal like a demolished building, the wrecking ball of his swift judgement startling.

“And to be quite frank, being profiled without my permission is offensive. I suppose this was your idea, Jack, since I’ve been dodging your attempts to get me into therapy for being too damn good at the job you so desperately rely on me to do?”

Jack shrugged, looking exhausted. “What other option have you left me, Will? I can’t have you out there without occasionally verifying you’re of sound enough mind to be tackling these cases.”

“I’m sorry, Will,” Hannibal added, mortified at how bright and hot his face still felt, how much he wanted Will to forgive him and want to be friends, or more, much more…

“Observing is what we do,” he went on awkwardly, taking another sip of by now cold and disgusting coffee, smothering the desire to shudder at the flat taste. Still, he needed something to do with himself other than talk because he was that unthinkably nervous. “I can’t shut mine off any easier than you can shut yours off.”

“I think we should test that theory out,” Will said, his annoyed features shifting into a thoughtful smile, as if Jack suddenly wasn’t in the room and he was entirely focused, *finally,* on Hannibal, occasioning the doctor a quick rush of raptured victory that frightened him.

“I don’t blame you for this ridiculous situation, by the way,” Will went on, looking so unbelievably pretty in that cheap shirt, probably bought on clearance at some department store, it wasn’t even any recognizable color but an unfortunate blend of blue and green that could not satisfy on either count, and those wrinkled khaki trousers had seen better days, but he looked *beautiful*.

Hannibal swallowed air that seemed harder to come by with every moment he passed in Will’s captivating presence. He should not have had the coffee; now he was going to have coffee breath, but wait, so would Will, thank goodness...why was he panicking?

“I think it would be a conflict of interest for you to profile me, Dr. Lecter.” Will’s mood seemed to have brightened the more he lavished that devastatingly gorgeous blue gaze upon Hannibal; he smiled now, and the world immediately lit up as Hannibal’s heart filled like a balloon destined to fly up to the heavens.

That smile could end him, easily.

“And why is that?” Hannibal hastened to inquire, running a shaky hand over his flawless shirt front, accosting himself inwardly for not wearing one of his very best suits today instead of

this plain tan one. The blue plaid three-piece would have been much more impressive!

“I’d rather ask for your phone number, doctor,” Will said slyly, eying him up by now.

“My…” Hannibal’s racing heart seemed to be smothering his brain’s attempts to process thought.

Will said his name in that subtle drawl of his, so sexily, *Doctah Lectah,* and Hannibal felt teased, in the best way. He felt *flirted* with but his usual confidence was floundering. He was still chasing an understanding of the panic, the high voltage emotion that had come from locking eyes with this boy, at least ten years his junior and wearing an atrociously rumpled outfit along with a pronounced social awkwardness on his sleeve. Will was confident and ingenious, but he had trouble relating to other people; however, he was choosing now of his own volition to single Hannibal out as worthy of his elusive attention, and Hannibal found himself consequently overwhelmed.

“Are you kidding me, Will? Come on, now.” Jack looked at the profiler sternly and drummed his fingers on his desk in disapproval. “I ask a highly reputable psychiatrist to work up a profile on you, and you’re trying to pick him up in my office?”

“You didn’t have to pick a highly reputable psychiatrist who looked like *this,*” Will smirked, nudging his chair a little closer to Hannibal’s and batting his long, beautiful dark lashes at the bewildered therapist. “So, what do you say, doctor? Would you like to get a drink sometime?”

This was too much; Hannibal couldn’t bear being the focus of the very same attention he desperately wanted; it was as if he had lived for almost fifty years in the dark and someone had just turned on all the lights; it was as though he had never really experienced a feeling before. How could he be certain Will wasn’t asking him out in jest? He worried, growing paranoid, after all, it had been a bit in poor taste to profile him without permission, to offer his intrusive observations out of the blue...was this proposition Will’s revenge for his own discourteousness, which he now deeply regretted?

Even if Will was seriously attracted to him, how could Hannibal let him get any closer? This potential obsession was dangerous to Hannibal’s carefully guarded autonomy and independence, and he did not know what indulging this powerfully distracting emotion would ultimately do to him; who could Will Graham make him become? What if he didn’t want to be that man, some softly doting lover, growing weak and capable of having his heart broken because he let someone else be in control of his happiness?

“I can’t, I really must be going, I think, I...I should be going,” Hannibal blathered, horrified at himself for wasting this chance to go out with Will, but too terrified at what he might feel if he did, too bent on self-preservation and the need to be alone with his thoughts again, sort them out until they made sense.

“Wait, where are you going?” Will asked, disappointed.

“That’s alright, Dr. Lecter, I understand you have a very full schedule of appointments today,” Jack put in, letting him off the hook. The man probably assumed Will’s advances had

made him uncomfortable, when in fact, the reasons for it were far too complicated for such a simple conclusion. “Can I call you later and follow up on today’s findings on the Shrike?”

“Certainly, I’m happy to continue consulting,” Hannibal said absent-mindedly, hardly registering that he was committing to keep helping on a case where Will Graham was lead investigator and their paths were sure to cross again. He wanted it, like he wanted to keep breathing, but he felt some desperate urge to protect himself from these feelings at the same time.

Chaos had overtaken his outlook on life, glorious, tumultuous, irresistible chaos by the name of Will Graham.

Chapter End Notes

Fic playlist: https://open.spotify.com/playlist/4WeoEljZNjydQouKxoEISf?si=8b89a567f62c408b

The moon that breaks the night

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will walked into the forensics lab precariously balancing a big tray of iced coffees and several decorative bags of cookies on one arm, but the smooth way he propped the door open and slipped in made it all look deceptively easy. He had developed a certain knack for this casually unconcerned attitude which went well with his veneer of flannel and floppy curls, suggesting an innocence which did not match his interior make-up. But nobody else needed to know the real him to like him, get a job done or interact socially; Will had long doubted he could meet someone up to the task of taking in the Real Will Graham, living to tell the tale *and* wanting to keep doing it. It always seemed like way too much to expect from a world populated by people with one dimensional morality, those who could not see the beautiful in the macabre.

Now there was a certain sweet tugging sensation in his heart and stomach making him replay that first meeting with Hannibal Lecter from that morning, yet Will couldn't fathom why he felt instinctively drawn to share himself, open up to a complete stranger.

Not, of course, that it hurt that said stranger was drop-dead fucking gorgeous, with a sexy accent, sophisticated style and a mysterious vulnerability which enticed him. During his lunch break, Will had looked into some of Dr. Lecter's published works, just skimming a few to get the main idea. The man was brilliant, too, getting to the heart of problematic social constructs and their inevitable habit of ostracizing supposed misfits with prose so elegant yet lively. Damn, now what in the world was Will going to do with a *crush*? At least it was a first, and he'd been hankering for one of those, for true novelty, since his first kill had supplied the last most vivid inspiration of his life.

"Coffee?" Brian Zeller piped up enthusiastically, bursting Will's thought bubble before he went totally nuts over a stranger, so probably a good interruption.

Zeller rushed forward and clapped Will on the shoulder, then took the tray and set it on a table at the front of the lab. "You're a total lifesaver, man, *thank* you."

"Weeding through all of the evidence from the Nichols house has been grueling," Beverly confided with a yawn verging on a groan.

She stood from her work at a microscope, studying particulates, and stretched before coming to join her friends, taking an iced coffee for herself with a grateful smile to Will.

"I brought you all some of my Mom's pumpkin spice latte cookies, too," Will enthused, his blue eyes sparkling with conviviality.

"Does that mean you got her to spill the recipe?" Jimmy Price asked pleadingly, opening a bag of cookies and taking one out to examine it as if it was sacred.

“Oh, hell no, she won’t even tell *me,*” Will laughed, dropping into a chair across from the table where the others were eating.

He slid the chair flush against the wall, trying to anchor and center himself, get ahold of his racing nerves, but the nervousness was so new and exciting, too. Maybe he should just give in; who knew what might happen? The unpredictability of this scenario with Lecter had his heart racing.

“Aren’t you going to have some, Will?” Beverly asked, “Should we save some for you?”

“That’s okay,” he smiled, pressing his still-sweaty palms against his khaki-clad knees. “I don’t actually like pumpkin flavored things all that much. I do love the way they smell, though.”

That was mainly because the olfactory association brought back years of happy memories about his mother baking in the Fall. It was her favorite season, and Maddie Graham never tired of celebrating it to the hilt.

“Something’s distracting you today,” Beverly guessed with her usual wryly targeted incisiveness. “Something other than the Minnesota Shrike.”

“Ha, good for you, then,” Jimmy contributed, finishing his first cookie before carefully examining a second. Will wouldn’t be surprised if he put it under one of the microscopes next. “I’m jealous. It’s been nothing but Shrike tv around here for weeks now.”

“We’ll catch him soon,” Will mused. “I’m heading out to Minnesota in the morning, think I got a lead on the Shrike’s old job.”

“And the distraction?” Beverly harped affectionately. “C’mon, I’ve never seen that look on your face before. You’re all dreamy, and God -- are you actually blushing?”

Will patted his own flushed cheeks and chuckled. “I guess I am. Well, I did meet someone earlier.”

“Who the hell are you picking up around here?” Brian asked. “Is it Stacey in Administration? She definitely has a crush on you.”

“Naw, it’s not Stacey,” Will sighed, plucking at the plastic lid on his coffee cup. “It’s this therapist Jack brought in to psychoanalyze me against my wishes. A...Dr. Hannibal Lecter?”

“I don’t know him,” Beverly said, her brow furrowed as she took out her cell phone and typed the doctor’s name in quickly.

“Hey, don’t Google him,” Will laughed nervously. Jesus, he never got self-conscious like this, what was going on, anyway? Why was the feeling so addictive? This must be why people kept dating even after years of disappointment in the tiresome endeavor, always tilting at the windmill of this indescribable, obsessive infatuation.

“Okay, Google him,” he said immediately thereafter. He wanted to get his friends’ opinion, after all, and any excuse to talk about Hannibal suddenly seemed hard to resist.

“Oh, damn,” Beverly noted, Brian and Jimmy hovering beside her to evaluate the photos on her screen. “Look at those cheekbones.”

Will, with as much subtlety as he could muster, wandered over to them and got an eyeful of Hannibal in a tux at the opera, some sort of big charity gala, apparently the doctor was quite the toast of Baltimore society.

Well, of course he is.

Will felt an unusual twinge of annoyance with himself. Had he really tried to pick up this godlike apparition of perfection using the phrase *“I’d rather have your number”*?

“Good-looking guy,” Brian acknowledged casually, more interested in the next cookie he was stealing from Jimmy’s bag.

“In sort of a mysterious, gothic way,” Jimmy pointed out, slapping Brian’s hand away from the cookies while shooting him a flirtatious wink. “So, when are you two going out?”

“The twelfth of Nevuary,” Will grumbled, starting to pace around the lab. “I made the mistake of hitting on him, in front of Jack no less, with all the sophisticated skill of a thirteen year old in a 7-11 parking lot. Needless to say, he was unimpressed.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure,” Beverly shrugged, “Maybe you just caught him off-guard. I mean no offense, but you can be sort of unpredictably intense. Plus, you’re very attractive. That combination can be intimidating.”

“You never tell us we’re very attractive,” Brian laughed as Will sighed, glancing down at his typically wrinkled shirt and wishing he’d bothered to drag the iron out last night to make sure he would be more presentable today.

He didn’t feel “very attractive,” and while normally he wasn’t too concerned with his physical appearance, it now seemed to abruptly matter how he looked. Normally, Will knew very well he was considered handsome by most people; he never had a hard time dating in the past, just a hard time caring or making connections. Now...he wanted to draw this guy he didn’t even know right to him like a moth to a flame, and this whole look definitely wasn’t going to do it.

“You could always try again,” Jimmy suggested, “If you’re that interested, it could be worth another go.”

“Yeah, I had to pursue this numbskull for months before he even agreed to go to dinner with me,” Brian joked, nodding at Jimmy.

“I was just trying to avoid the unfortunately inevitable result of ending up with the most infuriating human on the planet,” Jimmy replied drily as Brian fluttered his eyelashes and grinned.

“He turned me down flat,” Will complained, cheeks reddening at the recollection. “I don’t want to harass the guy by asking him out again after that.”

Still, there was no denying he *had* to see Hannibal again, he had to find a way. But what was the way, how did people navigate a situation this awkward, a fuck-up so profound, wasn't there a method for…

"Ah!" He crowed out of nowhere, stopping short in his tracks while the lightbulb moment manifested in a huge grin on his face that took his friends by surprise. "That's it! I've got it!"

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The *thing* that most people did was to apologize; it had taken Will longer to figure out this simple approach because he really never had to say he was sorry for anything. Although he loved his parents and enjoyed his friendships with the forensics crew, none of these people had a clue about his murderous nature. He never spent enough time with any one person or let them see enough of his truth to get out of line and *need* to say sorry. In dating, for example, it always seemed easiest to cut ties rather than lower himself to admitting he was wrong for whatever careless behavior he'd exhibited in his cold, disinterested, continually disappointed forays into that realm.

So after work, he went to the liquor store and wandered it until he found a bottle of wine -- a bordeaux blanc to be exact -- that cost about a quarter of his next paycheck. Reasoning if it was expensive and had this much fancy French cursive on the label, it must be a good wine, Will purchased it, then went home to change.

He found the iron on the top shelf of his closet and blew a cloud of dust off of it that made him cough, wiping the sweat from his brow, irritated he still felt slightly under the weather. The dogs sat on their pillows watching his strange procedure with their heads tilted to one side.

Will slapped the ironing board down on the living room floor and plugged the iron in. Now, which shirt and pants should get this previously unheard of special treatment? He ended up settling for a plain white shirt under a sage green sweater and a pair of dark brown pants; there was no need to be *too* dressed up as that would just look pathetic. Showing up out of the blue for a mea culpa with no reason to think he wouldn't make things worse was quite enough of a risk as far as Will was concerned.

He fed the dogs their dinner and let them out for a while, then when they went to sleep, he went back out, driving to Lecter's house all the way in fucking Baltimore, not even caring about the distance when he already had commuter's fatigue and just the weird tired sweaty thing, whatever it was, that wouldn't seem to go away lately. He hoped he didn't smell bad or anything as a result. Anyway, he turned on the radio to try and calm himself, running right into a song that made him almost fly through a red light in sudden, pained identification--

"If you could only see the beast you've made of me / I held it in but now it seems you've set it running free...The saints can't help me now, the ropes have been unbound / I hunt for you with bloodied feet across the hallowed ground…"

"Holy fucking shit," Will muttered, switching the channel to try and harness his runaway senses.

How far would he go to make sure Lecter gave him the time of day, what would he be willing to do to make sure the obsession became mutual? He had always been so self-righteous that his murderous proclivities had seemed just, but this fixation, if it collided with his beastly side, what would he become then? What would it feel like to give full vent to a *personal* passion for the first time in his life? There was no justice in this craving, but it was full of teeth and claws. He might easily break them both in the endeavor to discover what these feelings meant.

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Hannibal was settling down to a lovely dinner of bourguignon a la rude census taker, accompanied by perfect garlic parmesan duchess potatoes and a salad of baby greens with goat cheese and a honey-champagne vinaigrette, and therefore he was in no way contemplating his strange encounter with that handsome young FBI agent Will Graham. He wasn't tempted to call the boy and resume their interrupted flirtation, wasn't feeling unusually lonely this evening in the least.

Or so he told himself, unable to account for the way he couldn't taste anything spectacular in his as-ever flawless cuisine, not at all certain as to why he kept glancing at his phone which sat on the table beside his plate. If he had guests, it would be intolerably rude of him to have his phone here during dinner, but somehow he did not care to be too far away in case it should ring, in case he should decide to make any calls, to whom of course he could not say…

The doorbell rang and occasioned him a shock which also would have been quite embarrassing had he been in company; rustled abruptly from his thick thought tangent, his lackadaisical turning over of the swirls of potato on his plate, he gave a small, startled noise low in his throat and jolted from his chair as if electrified.

What an immature and foolish impulse, he chided himself, standing and smoothing out his three piece plaid suit, the blue one he should have worn earlier, not that it mattered.

He forced himself to walk with languidly casual progress to the front door, and having convinced himself it would be anyone except Will Graham, he was decidedly unprepared for his eyes to light once more on those stunning sapphire orbs which still, on a second meeting, seemed capable of wresting vast hurricanes of feeling from his normally jaded soul.

"Agent Graham," Hannibal greeted cooly, forcing his elated, terrified features into a resting state of unreadable response. "What a surprise."

"I'm sure it must be, and I hope you won't think it's rude of me to just show up here uninvited," Will began, nervous of course but sure of himself, that he had made a good decision, bewildering as that choice was to his sudden host.

"I brought wine!" Will added quickly, holding up a bottle of really quite decent-quality bordeaux blanc.

How charming he is. What lovely manners. Hannibal was smitten by this act, this gift, as if Will had arrived with an original Botticelli painting to hang on his wall. *My good boy,*

Hannibal thought before he could stop himself.

Hannibal glanced over Will's attire; under the boy's coat, he wore a very nice outfit which was smoothly ironed and showed attention to color, composition and fit. In short, he looked divine, the look complimented exquisitely by the rebellious twists and twirls of his chocolate curls clustered about his face and his adorable ears. He was catnip, and Hannibal was highly tempted. There was no possible chance of him summoning the wherewithal to dismiss the beautiful young man, so instead he stepped backward with a cautious, small smile and said over the sound of his pounding heartbeat, "Please, do come in." He took the wine bottle from Will's warm fingers, gleaning an instant sense of the perspiration on the boy's hands at the same time a hint of delectable fevered sweetness bewitched his senses.

He led the way on legs that felt wobbly, through to the dining room where his food still lay more played with than eaten on his plate, his glass of cabernet half-full.

"Aw, did I interrupt your dinner?" Will said with a moan of frustration that was altogether too beguiling. "Shit, I should have paid more attention to the time."

"It's of no concern to me, I assure you. Please, come to the kitchen and let me make you a plate, if you haven't yet eaten."

"That's so nice of you, thanks," Will grinned, encouraged.

In the kitchen, Hannibal reheated a plate of food; he always made far too much as if slightly desirous he someday might need to provide a meal that was less solitary, outside of his occasional and highly celebrated dinner parties. Perhaps the ritual also emerged from the harsh period of starvation in childhood which immediately preceded his sister's death, but he kept those memories in a locked room deep at the back of his memory palace, and chose not to give the idea much contemplation now.

He did not normally care to use the microwave, a problematically artificial device whose stark modernity conflicted with his pristinely old world aesthetic, but he used it now as it was simply the best way to get good food into a tired, hard-working and baffling boy's hungry stomach. He heard Will's belly give a plaintive grumble and his heart softened even further, effacing, corrupted by an uninvited, absurd affection with no deep acquaintance to give it understandable substance. It was shapeless but all around and inside him, this inclination to keep Will close and learn everything about him, even gain the nerve to share of himself with intimate honesty, it was all Hannibal seemed to be about in this moment, which was frightening but devilishly exciting.

That was Will Graham all over.

They went back to the dining room for a surprisingly cozy meal, in the course of which Will praised his cookery to the high heavens and made Hannibal's cheeks flush.

"Curious as to how you obtained my address," Hannibal remarked, immediately thereafter making the mistake of placing a piece of meat on his tongue and finding the succulent, juicy meat too chewy and almost impossible to swallow. He cleared the food finally with an awkward gulp and took an unusually generous sip of his wine.

“Jack gave it to me, expressly because I begged him, it was embarrassing really, and told him I wanted to apologize in person.”

“Really? Whatever for?”

“Well, for...hitting on you? During a work meeting and when we don’t even know each other. I guess in retrospect I’ve been beating myself up about it all day. I’m not used to feeling guilty like that, but anyway. I’m sorry if I made you feel uncomfortable, Doctor.”

“Please, call me Hannibal,” he said breezily, the lump in his throat still there after swallowing the offensive meat, making him realize it did not originate from the food.

Even his enjoyment of watching Will take his first few, unknowing bites of human flesh was muted by his overwhelming anxiety. How did he look? Was Will going to “hit on him” again or was that off the table now? If so, how to get it back on, or should he be running back to Lithuania in dread of this intense longing? Even the ghosts of his past were beginning to seem less imposing than a commonplace dinner conversation with a perfect stranger.

Problem being, said perfect stranger was far too perfect, and the indomitable Dr. Hannibal Lecter was *dominated*, was hypnotized by the very sight of him, the sound of his pleasantly manly, melodious voice traipsing lazily over words with utter frankness.

With almost vampyric skill, the boy wove an effortless reverie of charm through the very oxygen that parted them.

“You did not make me uncomfortable in the least,” Hannibal lied. “Perhaps I was merely surprised.” The latter was one hundred percent truth.

“Taken off-guard?” Will wondered. “I bet that doesn’t happen too often. I can’t help feeling a bit flattered.”

“Ah. A keen observation, but it does reveal you are equally as incapable of turning off your psychoanalytic skills.” Hannibal smirked, but he was still blushing, much to his own mortification.

Will’s haunting blue eyes fixed momentarily on Hannibal’s brightly tinged cheeks with unmistakable satisfaction. “You got me there. Does it bother you?”

“Not if we’re to be friends,” Hannibal mused. “Then I might be rather charmed to open myself up to your incisive perceptions of my nature.”

“Hmm.” Will finished a sip of velvety wine and contemplated before replying, “As long as I don’t penetrate too deeply, though, right?”

“You really cannot help flirting, can you, Agent Graham?” Hannibal smiled wider, flashing his pearly fangs, igniting a prideful look in Will, as if the boy was delighted to have brought him amusement and reciprocated engagement.

“I suppose not,” Will admitted, biting his lip for a second. “And please, call me Will.”

The line from Shakespeare pierced Hannibal to the quick -- "*Oh, that I was a glove upon that hand!*" Oh, to sink his own teeth into those gorgeously plump pink lips, which were in such magnificent contrast to the prickly-looking stubble he longed to feel rubbing against his thighs--

He cleared his throat, but failed to make the distracting, seductive thoughts disperse. "I see," he said fumblingly, but he didn't really see anything, or at least nothing appropriate.

"Does *that* bother you, Hannibal?" Will lavished his first name with throaty attention that raked heat up the older man's spine.

Will dragged his finger slowly around the rim of his wine glass as something dark and deep sat in his blue gaze, fixated directly on Hannibal without wavering. Hannibal glanced down at the young man's elegant, long fingers. What strong, working man's hands, doubtless a little calloused on the palms but so perfectly formed, an extension of a beautifully powerful mind. Everything Jack Crawford had told him, all the rumors he had heard of the astoundingly brilliant agent who closed record numbers of harrowing murder cases, the boy who went to the dark and came back intact, it all felt entirely reductive to Will's presence.

Hannibal wanted those perfect hands working by his side in the hunt, tearing flesh from bone, those pretty teeth sinking in to rip and taste, as much as he wanted those fingers devastatingly deep inside him, dragging heated pleasure and raunchy gasps from him. He had never considered a full partner, in every sense of the word, but now it was difficult to think of other things.

He forced himself to think of other things, for example that this was simply too perilous, and at any rate he was allowing lust to contort his emotions. How could he be falling in love with a complete stranger mere hours after setting eyes upon him? And if he was, how could he let this continue when it threatened all the independence he had so painstakingly worked into an art? He must remain protected in his haughty fortress, but that did not mean he couldn't have a bit of fun, so long as he kept his thoughts properly organized.

"No, it doesn't irk me a bit. All of my friends flirt with me," he resumed smugly, and the corner of Will's sumptuous mouth tweaked up in a naughty smirk.

"I bet they do."

Hannibal felt disorganized.

"Would you join me in the living room for another drink?" he asked after cheerfully refusing Will's attempt to help him clear their dishes from the table.

Will cupped the back of his neck and rubbed it, standing in Hannibal's kitchen as if he truly belonged there. Hannibal didn't want him to leave.

"I guess I really shouldn't; I have to fly to Minnesota first thing in the morning to follow up on a lead in the Shrike case."

"Very well, then." Hannibal closed the refrigerator door, having planned to pour them each a glass of the bordeaux blanc.

"I shouldn't," Will grinned mischievously. He had noticed where the wine glasses were kept and took out two clean ones from the cabinet, the movement so intimate somehow, lending Hannibal the fleeting fantasy Will lived here.

Will strode smoothly over to Hannibal and set the glasses down on the counter closer to the refrigerator, so that he lingered near enough to the older man for his delicious body heat and heady, enticing scent of excited desire to be more than evident. Hannibal raised his brows with an intrigued, questioning smile, and Will added in a low, saucy tone, "But I will. I'll stay."

Chapter End Notes

Song lyrics in Will’s car from “howl” by Florence + the Machine.

Sanctuary

Chapter Notes

cw: a bit of tipsy hooking up

The song for this chapter is "Sanctuary" by Allie X. 💕

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“You have a beautiful home,” Will smiled as Hannibal led the way to an attractive, but quite imposing living room decorated with numerous renditions of antlers.

Dark shadows seemed to drip from the green fleur de lis wallpaper, draping over the chairs and desks with their hooved feet and arching, jagged antlers, whispering unintelligible secrets, beckoning to Will not to get too comfortable or trusting. He liked it in here; it suited Hannibal perfectly. So many edges and angles, so much complicated emotion thinly veiled in ruthlessly pristine, grimly romantic aesthetic.

They settled into two soft chairs and enjoyed the wine with some more quiet, pleasant conversation, just slowly getting to know each other better. Their intrigued, contented voices followed a languorous path back to vague hints of their boyhoods, then college and career, favorite haunts and hobbies.

Will admired the way Hannibal looked by the low glow of the lamps, the same shadows that floated imposingly on the air sometimes obscuring one side of his face so that he looked wrought from marble, smooth, untouchable and irresistible.

He had always been prone to vivid daydreams and a habit of visualizing his feelings, his interpretations of people and places and experiences. He was used to it; if he saw a row of bright red roses, he might also see blood dripping from the smooth petals. If he looked at Hannibal from a certain angle, the man took on the appearance of a dark, strikingly feral stag. Still the shadows swirled and toyed with Will’s perception; Hannibal’s voice slid down his spine and under his clothes, the doctor’s softly charming wit pressing to his naked skin like clutching fingers, the sensuous rumble in Hannibal’s voice raising his fever.

What was underneath all these fine manners and that goddamn scrumptious three piece suit, and what would it be like to unmask Dr. Hannibal Lecter, expose his most carefully hidden layers and make him desperate for nothing else but more and more of what Will could give him?

His visions seemed more acute than usual, most likely owing to the weird fever and this absolutely *wonderful* wine, but Will enjoyed the challenge of the overwhelming sensations, a feast of novelty. Everything he saw, heard and felt seemed unbearably heightened, and this was one of the best nights he could remember for quite a long time.

“You play?” Will asked, nodding to the harpsichord behind his chair.

He set his almost empty wine glass down and leaned toward Hannibal, the curious expression on his face adding, *is there anything you can’t do?*

Hannibal cooked, on a five Michelin star level. He was an eminently respected psychiatrist, had a gorgeous, exquisitely decorated house that was practically a mansion, he looked like the star of an especially posh porno from Will’s outlandishly greedy imagination, and he dressed like a Garrison Bespoke model.

Seriously, if Hannibal was as good in bed as his cocky attitude, ego, intelligence and sexy body implied, how was Will even going to handle him?

With great enthusiasm.

“Indeed. And I compose. The harpsichord is a truly splendid instrument, bringing us back to a more regal and compelling time. I often find my music taking me places I had not intended, and the unpredictability of the instrument is part and parcel of its charm.”

“Can I hear something?” Will asked eagerly, and Hannibal looked so proud and pleased to have been asked.

Dr. Lecter might be a little buzzed himself by now; his words were ever so slightly blurring into that velvety accent, and the blush he’d worn all night was getting even brighter. His carefully slicked back hair had even loosened, falling over his brow so prettily, Will’s fingers longed to reach over and brush it back, then give all that soft, greying hair a few nice hard tugs while…

Easy, Graham, you’re in the middle of a conversation, and this isn’t even officially a date, it’s an apology visit for asking for a date.

“You certainly may.” Hannibal remained fluid in movement despite his slight intoxication, easily slipping out of his suit jacket and folding it carefully over the chair. That was for the best, after all; he wouldn’t want to lose the pocket square.

If anyone had told Will yesterday he was going to fall for a guy who wore pocket squares…

Hannibal upended the rest of Will’s thoughts on the subject by rolling up the sleeves of his brilliant blue shirt, showing off strong forearms and big hands lined in veins. His plaid waistcoat clung to his fit torso while the tie, in shiny paisley, glimmering shades of violet and gold, showed a flair so confident, it really made Will want to tie the good doctor’s wrists together and give him the pounding of a lifetime.

Ahem.

Will made no attempt to keep his eyes off Hannibal’s perfect ass while the older man went to the harpsichord, only complimented the lovely view with the last, long sip of wine in his glass. Yes, he’d love to cover those soft curves in his own claiming handprints, bite marks, nail scratches and bruises.

“....this is one of my favorite compositions by Bach,” Hannibal was saying, smiling shyly as he began playing The Goldberg Variations.

The music built so slowly, tentative at first as clock hands slowly shifting, time moving by reluctant increments, a tease. But then Hannibal’s hands were flying so fast over the keys, sending such lively, vibrant notes into the air that Will was almost dizzy.

“This is incredible,” he could not help exclaiming, staring at Hannibal in amazement.

His outburst threw Hannibal off his flawless game; his fingers stumbled over the next few notes and he stopped short, looking embarrassed.

“Hey,” Will smiled, going over to sit on the bench beside him. He bumped Hannibal’s shoulder with his own and exulted, “I’m not kidding, that was exquisite. I’m genuinely impressed, Hannibal.”

“Since I doubt that you are often genuinely impressed, I shall take that as a compliment,” Hannibal replied, calming down, as if Will’s praise had the power to heal his soul so quickly. That power felt like the best high Will had ever known aside from killing.

“You’re right about that,” he answered with a quiet tension. “Think I can impress you, too?”

Will wanted to make a move so badly, but if he went for the kiss and Hannibal wasn’t ready, it could shatter this magical evening. He was still testing the waters, content to do so for now, even as his desire roared inside him so profoundly.

“You already have.” Hannibal’s eyes were like amber blown glass, molten gold. His lips were so damn kissable, it hurt.

Will leaned in just a little closer and Hannibal didn’t move away. The tension between them threatened to ignite and consume everything touching Will’s senses. Hannibal smelled of luxurious cologne, spicy and seductive, and Will shifted even closer, smiling with gentle questions welling in his eyes.

Hannibal nodded and Will closed his eyes, then barely brushed their lips together, creating a warmth that flowed from the point of contact all through his body, sending electricity down his spine.

“This is kind of soon,” he whispered against Hannibal’s lips.

“Especially since you came here tonight to apologize for flirting with me,” Hannibal affirmed teasingly.

Will laughed softly, then grabbed him by the necktie and layed a harder, smoldering kiss on his lips, easing his tongue between them to caress Hannibal’s own, loving the moan that echoed between them, hot, slick, unidentifiable as separate to either, the product of their mutual yearning made real.

“Dr. Lecter, imagine the scandal,” he teased when they drew back again, “If Jack ever found out--”

Just then, as if he'd gone too far by mentioning his boss's name and invited disaster, his phone rudely vibrated in his back pocket.

"Never mind that," Will muttered dismissively, wanting more of the taste of Hannibal's mouth, especially on the inside, the honeysuckle notes from the wine and Hannibal's heat, how easy it was to give him pleasure and take his own. How tempting.

He took Hannibal's face between his hands and kissed him with decadent slowness, tracing the shape of his lips with his tongue, sucking the lower lip and nipping it before lavishing his tongue against Hannibal's with increasing boldness.

Hannibal clung to his elbows and moaned again, almost a whimper. "*Will,* I…"

The phone vibrated again. "Dammit," Will grumbled, whipping it out of his pocket and checking the screen to see two missed calls from Jack, indeed as if his reckless jokes had summoned the interruption.

"Ugh, for fuck's sake, I can't have one night to myself," Will frowned, "Sorry, I have to call Jack or he'll never leave me alone. It's probably important."

"Not entirely to yourself," Hannibal purred, slumping against him and kissing his neck with slow, expert precision.

Will's cock ached, filled out and pressed against his trousers as he groaned in pleasure. Hannibal's mouth was *so* good, pretty, hot, skilled, just begging to have Will's dick plunging hard and deep inside, fucking right to the back of his throat so that sexy accent was going to sound so raspy afterwards, *God*--

"You need to fly to Minnesota tonight," Jack snapped, apropos of a greeting so that Will knew there had been another murder right away. Poor Jack, this case was really eating him alive.

"I have a flight booked for the morning, I'll be there by--"

"No, now. I'm on my way to the airport myself, I'll see you in an hour."

Will sighed, wrapping a lazy arm around Hannibal to encourage the doctor's attentive nuzzling into the soft skin between his neck and shoulder, where the older man was laying a particularly sloppy kiss.

"Oh! Oh-kay, I'll see you then," he promised Jack, then ended the call.

"Do you have any idea how good that feels?" He sighed, running his fingers through Hannibal's hair, enjoying the silky texture and the chance to mess him up, at least a little.

A sneak preview.

"I know how much I want you to show me," Hannibal said thickly, his eyes half-lidded.

“Mmm, don’t tempt me. I’ve got to sober up and drive to the airport.” He kissed Hannibal’s forehead, then covered his own mouth as he yawned.

Standing, he stretched his arms and tried to shake himself from this stupor of infatuation. But Hannibal stared up at him with this adorably disappointed little pout and Will just melted automatically.

“Do you...wanna come with me?” he invited, “To Minnesota? To investigate a cannibalistic serial killer and hopefully catch him?”

Hannibal’s eyes flitted over Will’s face with a sudden flash of something he couldn’t quite read, as if there was some amusing or ironic component of the invitation in addition to the obviously morbid suggestion it contained.

“Our first official date,” Hannibal grinned.

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After two cups of black coffee and substantial straightening out of both their clothes, Will called his parents to let them know of his earlier departure, although it wouldn’t much change what time they needed to take care of the dogs in the morning.

There wasn’t time to go home and get his luggage, so Hannibal packed some extra clothes from his own wardrobe in a separate, incredibly fancy suitcase for Will and they were off in the doctor’s shiny Bentley. Will felt like a million bucks, completely distracted from his impending work in the best way.

His floaty sensation lasted the whole drive staring at Hannibal’s beautiful profile by moonlight and enjoying the deft way he drove, sure and serene, his hand occasionally reaching for Will’s, giving a squeeze or a brush of his knuckles to make the younger man’s knees weak.

As they undid their seatbelts, Will suggested, “Maybe let me explain why you’re here? I’m pretty good at smoothing things over with Jack.”

“He’s your supervisor, feel free to do the talking,” Hannibal agreed. He got out first and circled the car to open the door for Will.

“What a gentleman,” Will marveled, feeling spoiled. Maybe the reason his other dates never turned him on or thrilled him this much was that nobody ever treated him with such thoughtful care.

As he got out of the car, Hannibal put one large, warm hand on the side of his stomach and poured hot breath against his cheek along with the husky words, “I can still taste your kiss.”

He pressed a soft one to Will’s cheek and smiled knowingly as Will took a few deep, bracing breaths.

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“Dr. Lecter,” Jack said with surprise as the men approached him in the airport lobby, pulling their suitcases on wheels behind them. With the diminished personal space and automatically coordinating paces, they looked like a married couple. “Are you joining us?”

“Well, he was with me when you called. I went over to apologize for the way I acted at this morning’s meeting, and we ended up talking about the case for a few hours. Since he’s up to speed, I thought we’d benefit from having Dr. Lecter’s perspective on this.”

Jack obviously saw right through this threadbare explanation of their impromptu date night, not least of all because both men were still blushing and their mouths were slightly swollen from kissing. However, he was too busy and invested in the work to waste time complaining or accusing.

“Fine, I agree it’s a privilege to have your insight here, Dr. Lecter.” Jack looked about two seconds shy of rolling his eyes.

“Thank you, Agent Crawford, I appreciate the opportunity to see how the FBI operates and offer my services in helping good Will see this cannibal’s face.” Hannibal was so prim and proper, but his arm was brushing Will’s shoulder, they were standing so close.

“Right. Let’s go get you a ticket,” Jack suggested, heading for the booking desk ahead of them.

“I don’t think he suspects a thing,” Will whispered, kidding, making Hannibal chuckle.

“See if you can keep your hands off each other while we’re working,” Jack tossed over his shoulder, making Will cringe at the call-out.

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“Today was grueling,” Will sighed the following night, flinging himself onto the motel bed as Hannibal closed the door behind them and smilingly guided their suitcases in.

“You did a remarkable job analyzing the murder scene,” Hannibal noted, sitting on the bed beside him. “It was an honor to watch you work.”

“Likewise,” Will answered, his eyes fluttering open as he regarded Hannibal with interest. “Your insights really helped. We work well together, Doctor.”

Hannibal leaned in to affectionately tap his nose. “I think so, too.”

“Is this place way too scuzzy for you to stand staying in?” Will asked, sitting up and caressing Hannibal’s arm lightly with one finger. The small, stolen, teasing touches between them had been driving him crazy all day.

“Normally, I would prefer the best possible hotel in the area, but I know you’re expected to use the accommodations provided by the FBI,” Hannibal mused. “I also usually choose a place that includes an en suite kitchen. I am very picky about what goes in my mouth, and as a consequence I tend to make most meals myself.”

“With a mouth like this, I don’t blame you for being picky,” Will answered flirtatiously, brushing his thumb over Hannibal’s lips. “Hmm. Are you heading out, then, to find a better hotel with a nice big kitchen? Escape this fearful hovel?”

“No.” Hannibal kissed Will’s finger. “I’ll stay here with you, unless you have other plans.”

Will smiled, calmed and centered by the idea of Hannibal *staying*. They felt inextricably bound already in a way that mystified him.

“In that case, let me shower, then take you out to dinner on FBI funds,” Will suggested. “There’s a Denny’s right next door that…”

He dissolved into laughter as Hannibal made a repulsed expression that was the cutest and funniest thing he’d ever seen.

“Okay, okay, I’m just kidding. You take me out to dinner, any place you like.”

Hannibal smiled resplendently and Will tossed him the visitor’s guide to Nowhere, Minnesota that sat on the bedside table.

“Even in the middle of nowhere, I’m sure you can find something special. Surprise me.”

“It would be my utmost pleasure to surprise you, Will.” Hannibal’s delighted face contained such multitudes, Will couldn’t stop thinking about the man’s complexities as he headed to the bathroom for a much-needed shower.

Hannibal was entirely composed of secrets, it seemed, and uniquely able to dangle them in front of Will’s face, then pull them away right before he could figure it all out.

Still, it was only a matter of time before Will got to the truth of Hannibal Lecter. He was an amazing detective, after all, with intense empathy and seasoned analytical abilities, even clouded by affection that was blooming far too quickly in his previously cold heart. As he massaged shampoo into his hair, Will thought he couldn’t wait to keep diving into this romantic adventure, certain there were many more sweet surprises to come.

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When he reemerged, a towel around his waist and another in his hand as he rubbed his hair dry, Will saw Hannibal fast asleep on the bed, the city guide pamphlet still open in his hand.

Sighing at how sweet and peaceful, how beautiful the older man looked immersed in slumber, Will went closer and sat down beside him, examining his face and the way his brow furrowed as a frown formed in result of whatever dreams he was lost in. Will caressed his face, wondering if Hannibal’s demons were anywhere near as dangerous as his own. Whatever that danger was, he could taste it on the air between them, just as palpable as the sweetness and vulnerability. There were the teeth and claws, too, always, for them both. He saw it in Hannibal’s elegant features under increasingly restless repose, his hands now grasping the blanket as if in violent defense.

Still stroking Hannibal's face slowly, Will hovered over him and placed a gentle kiss on his lips, then another. Hannibal half-roused, his hands relaxing on the blanket, then rising to frame Will's hips. Will let himself sink against the doctor and moaned into the next kiss to find they were both equally hard. Their lips parted and Will looked into Hannibal's still sleepy eyes, feasting again on the unknown, on this intense need burning him up inside.

"Hi there," he murmured, reaching down to press Hannibal's hand to the hasty fold of his towel which was the only fabric concealing his nakedness. He was still warm from the shower, his skin flushed and moist. Hannibal's eyes widened and he looked up at Will with fierce yearning.

"I think we should eat in tonight, actually," Will said with a smile that felt very serious, his voice sure but throaty with desire. He nuzzled his face into Hannibal's, teasing him with another too-brief kiss, his breath tickling Hannibal's lips. "What do you think?"

"*Yes,*" Hannibal answered on a halting breath, deftly removing Will's towel and tossing it aside, and then they were making out like shameless teenagers who had each never been kissed, never seen an attractive person naked before, like two horny virgins on the last night before the end of the world.

Hannibal groped Will's ass and licked aggressively into his mouth, so greedy and fast it made Will dizzy. "Oh, God, Daddy," Will moaned, then turned red in the face, straddling a clothed Hannibal while completely naked himself in many senses of the word.

But he hadn't gone too far in letting this particular kink slip from his lips; it only made Hannibal moan back, the sound deep in his throat and reflecting a reciprocated arousal all too apparent as well from the thickening hard-on nudging the front of the doctor's plaid suit pants.

"You like that?" Will asked, sitting up astride Hannibal and unbuttoning his shirt. "Like me calling you Daddy?"

"Yes," Hannibal said again, so uncharacteristically monosyllabic in this encounter, as if his repeated assent was all that he needed to vocalize, and everything else he preferred to tell Will with his body.

"Yes," he whispered, effortlessly flipping their positions so that Will lay under him.

With his blue shirt undone, showing off a broad, hairy, muscular chest and a toned stomach with a cute little roundness, Hannibal went back to his favorite new hobby of obsessively kissing Will's neck. Will gasped and clutched Hannibal's hair as the older man's insatiable mouth seemed half-intending to *eat* him, the kisses so lush and savoring, building to experimental bites which grew more intense when Will cried out in obviously delirious approval. One hand still pulling Hannibal's hair, the other under his shirt dragging nails down his powerful back, Will gave a wanton mewl when the doctor bit his soft, vulnerable neck hard enough to leave a claiming mark, then sucked the bite mark, drawing an ecstatic combined pain and pleasure from Will.

This was how Hannibal played the harpsichord, the opposite of the way he acted among others, so formal and refined. Here, playing Will's body like his latest brilliant composition, Hannibal showed equal parts expertise and desperate passion, biting Will's shoulder, his bicep, licking his collarbones and then his nipples, his big hand sweeping down over the younger man's smooth chest and stomach with calculation, confidence, but so much *need.* His eyes were lust-blown and raging when he brought them back to Will's face, before touching in such a more intimate way.

It was Will's turn to say, with panting encouragement, "Yes, yes, yes--"

Hannibal generously licked his own hand, then wrapped it around Will's rock-hard dick and began to slowly stroke, pleasure emanating from his every touch as Will sputtered out sighs and gasps.

"So, so good, Daddy, you're so good to me, oh, please don't stop," he begged, throwing his head back as the sensation built too fast -- too soon to come, he wanted to save it all up until they had been at this for ages -- he bit his lip, but couldn't help asking for what he wanted next, even knowing it was probably going to be the end of his endurance.

"I think it's time we put that pretty mouth of yours to good use," he said, his cocky brashness resurging despite the aching tremble in his voice.

Hannibal smiled smugly when Will put a hand on his head and pushed him down a little.

"Like this?" Hannibal suggested, delicately licking the tip and swallowing Will's precum before he enveloped Will's rigid length in his velvety, slick mouth, rocking his head back and forth in a perfect tempo.

Bliss such as Will had never tasted seemed to be blooming from inside him just as these tender emotions had grown, and his fascination with Hannibal's mysteries, from the first time their eyes locked. Pleasure shook him like a storm and he cried out so loudly, as his toes curled and his fingers twisted in Hannibal's hair, that he was sure someone would complain to motel management pretty soon.

"Hnnhh, fuck, oh-my-God--" He blurted, losing the ability to form even his simplest, coarsest words when Hannibal deep-throated him and Will almost convulsed with unbelievable pleasure -- thank goodness he didn't come yet, he still really wanted to make this last, but *God, God, God…*

No one he'd been with before had been like this, powerfully skilled and one hundred percent focused on nothing but his enjoyment, and Hannibal was so unstoppably intense, it almost seemed as if Will's pleasure brought him his own, and he was growing addicted. He pulled his mouth off of Will's cock with a loud, wet popping sound, but went on stroking him exquisitely from base to tip as he sucked his balls with just enough pressure to bring increased pleasure with no discomfort, smiling delightedly at Will's continued ragged gasps.

"Get your fucking clothes off and get under me," Will ordered, at the moment he knew he was again right on the brink of orgasm.

Will's rough insistence made Hannibal moan as the older man shrugged off his shirt, then undid his pants and bared himself. He lay down on his back with perfect obedience and Will got his first look at the *everything* he had wanted so deeply to see all along. Well, almost everything. He still didn't know every motive, hope, fear and plot making the doctor's heart thunder when he pressed his lips to his chest.

"*Look* at you," Will sighed, dragging his hands down Hannibal's hairy chest and stomach, tracing his hips and squeezing his thighs. Every inch of the man was perfection, making Will want to commit himself to obsessive worship. "My handsome Daddy. Are you all mine tonight?"

Hannibal nodded, his brown eyes soft and intent on Will's blazing stare.

"Yeah?" Will asked in a roughly teasing tone which somehow managed to hold all of his immense affection as well. "All mine, every stunning, delectable inch of you."

He stretched himself over Hannibal, barely allowing their groins to touch, just a quick slide of their erections to make them both groan in immediate pleasure. Will kissed Hannibal's neck, his own still joyously resonating pain from his lover's bite. He marked Hannibal in the same exact place, and the doctor let out a coarse breath, rocking his hips desperately to try and get friction from Will's cock. His hands slid down Will's sweat-slick back and the fever pulsed wildly in the agent's brain. "That's right, you're mine."

Will pinned Hannibal's hands down hard, his strong grip merciless on the doctor's wrists shoved against rumpled grey sheets. The younger man's powerful biceps flexed as he held Hannibal right where he wanted him, then leaned in to mutter in his ear, "I want to go all the way. Would you like that, Daddy?" With a devilish smile at Hannibal's softly pleading moans, Will added, "Want me to *fuck* you?"

Hannibal's eyes were filled with tears as he nodded, helplessly surrendering to Will's whims.

"Say it," Will commanded, rocking them together so that their cocks slid flush again, pleasure radiating from the contact, sizzling through his being and warming his core. "I want to hear you say it."

"Please, Will," Hannibal begged. He looked so lost and confused, as if he didn't understand how he had been brought to this place of submissive need, lying there like a ragdoll pillow princess, about to break into a million pieces if he couldn't have Will's cock inside him.

"I want you to fuck me," he added meekly, and Will kissed his lips, smiling with approval.

"I want to make you feel so good, Daddy, like you deserve." Will got the bottle of lube which Hannibal blushingly admitted to packing in his suitcase, then wasted no further time in crawling down the bed to suck Hannibal off, displaying his own stunning oral skills as the size and weight of the older man's gorgeous cock made him even hotter and harder himself.

He stroked Hannibal's cock slowly, then dripped plenty of saliva on his tight hole and ate him out, rapturous at the chance to drive the polite, sophisticated therapist completely out of his mind with pleasure. He had never been this passionate with anyone, licking and fingering

Hannibal open as the obscenities dropping from his tongue revealed how turned on he was by his lover's submission and the clinging, warm clutch of his beautiful body. Then Will understood how Hannibal had managed to portray this same feeling when he was the one giving pleasure and Will received; there did not seem to be any line dividing their bliss as individual. Will's long, slender fingers drove harder and deeper inside Hannibal, pressing to his prostate, and Hannibal's startled cries of ecstasy mingled with the excitement making Will's heart skip several beats as his cock throbbed with the need to be sheathed in the older man.

"Ready for me, huh?" Will smiled, his lips glossy-wet with precum and spit as Hannibal traced them, then pulled Will down into his strong arms for a long kiss.

"Fuck me, baby," Hannibal sighed, and Will reached down to slick his bulging, needy cock to his lover's entrance.

"Just like this?" Will pushed inside slowly, his fingers curled against Hannibal's face, his knuckles stroking the chiseled cheekbones tenderly.

Hannibal was incredibly tight even after Will's lengthy and dedicated foreplay, and it had to hurt, so Will took it very carefully, waiting for Hannibal to get used to the fullness inside him inch by inch.

The tension of holding back from pressing in harder and faster was almost more than Will could take. Hannibal felt *so* indescribably good, as if Will was finally where he had always needed to be without realizing it. His body held Will close and tight, sucking him in slowly, and Will grunted while sweat dripped from his face onto Hannibal's.

"You're beautiful," Will praised, unprepared for the way this made tears of exertion and pained joy stream from Hannibal's eyes. "Oh, Hannibal."

Realization dawned and he softly caressed Hannibal's hip in soothing circles. "This is the first time you've bottomed, isn't it?"

Hannibal nodded, bashful, and locked his legs around Will's back, helping his cock to slide the last few inches in until Will was fully seated. They stared into each other's eyes with ragged breaths, then Hannibal repeated in a broken whimper, "More, please. Please...Will…? Please."

Will snarled in lustful ferocity and pinned him to the bed again, pulling out almost all the way before slamming in to the hilt. Hannibal went on moaning and crying, but there was no mistaking his response as that of pain or dislike of the experience. Every reaction painted an unforgettable portrait of a man discovering a pleasure so deep it resculpted him, and whenever he could summon the clarity to speak an actual word, it was always the same plea, "More, Will, please!"

"You're so fucking needy, aren't you? Aren't you?" Will accused adoringly, fucking Hannibal solidly into the bed; the mattress was soaked in sweat and precum, musk and desire thick in the air, the weak bedframe loudly rattling with every rough snap of his hips.

“Yes,” Hannibal sputtered out deliriously, “Yes, just for you, Will.”

“Good.” Will grinned resplendently, like pure sunshine. He was so incredibly happy, he could burst in more than one way. “Because I’m the same way over you, Daddy. Roll over for me.”

He pulled out of Hannibal with a momentary groan of deprivation and waited for the older man to get into the new position in accordance with his order.

“Mmm.” Will’s palm circled Hannibal’s plush ass teasingly, then he pulled back and gave him one good, firm spanking. “Like that, too?”

Hannibal cried out in some foreign language that was goddamn gorgeous, the most profane poetry. “Yes, yes,” he added hastily in English.

“Your fucking perfect, gorgeous *body,*” Will murmured possessively. He wanted Hannibal to be his forever, and in the fever rush of this heart-pounding encounter, he had lost track of all the reasons why forming such a strong attachment a day after meeting was a terrible idea.

“Need it again, even harder, Daddy?”

Hannibal nodded, “Give me everything you have to give.”

He pressed his hands to the sheets as Will gripped his hip in one hand and used the other to ease himself back into the doctor’s still relaxed and slick hole.

“*Fuck,*” Will grunted, shaking his head in disbelief at the tight, warm perfection.

Spanking Hannibal a few more times, he let go of his last fraying strand of restraint and pounded into him relentlessly, targeting the older man’s prostate so that a few thrusts later, Hannibal was red-faced and slightly drooling while his orgasm roared through him, making his whole body shudder. Will could only imagine the intensity of what was probably his first prostate stimulation orgasm, and he felt such prideful delight in being lucky enough to be the one to give it to him. The turn-on of this, and of Hannibal’s weak, nonstop begging for Will to keep going, sent him over the edge until his hips spasmed hard against Hannibal's pink, spanked ass and he came with a startled cry. His cum shot deep inside Hannibal and he kept on fucking, drawing every millisecond of bliss out to the longest possible depth.

Will’s body shook, his mind reeling in disbelief at the tremendous pleasure taking him over, but he made sure to take the time to soothe Hannibal’s overwhelmed state, withdrawing from the doctor’s body and draping himself over it with soft coos of further praise and lots of sweet kisses to Hannibal’s sweaty brow, his ears, his neck and back. Using his body weight to anchor Hannibal in affectionate solicitude, Will thanked him and told him how good he had been, how perfect he felt, how he couldn’t wait to do it again.

Hannibal remained silent but leaned into and accepted every drop of attention as if he was still starving and parched for it. Will knew the feeling: enough couldn’t possibly be enough.

Chapter End Notes

So...while that sex scene was one of my first ideas for the story, I always intended it to occur much later. However, I literally could not hold them back from each other and here we are!

Next time: Hannibal's insecurities and confusion cause Will's insecurities and confusion to go into overdrive. In addition to finishing up the Shrike case, there very well may be a trip to the opera coming up as well...I do hope none of Hannibal's social circle get caught in Will's crosshairs! 🤔

Thanks to all who have been reading, leaving kudos, and said they're enjoying the story so far!

I don't need your closure

Chapter Notes

> cw: Will gets called a brat a bunch in this chapter, which while not so much degrading in my view as, well, proud point of fact, 😄 I did feel deserved a mention here.
>
> The songs for this chapter are “closure” by Taylor Swift, “Felt this Way” by Carly Rae Jepsen, and “Easy” by Demi Lovato & Noah Cyrus.

Hannibal was everything and everywhere at once in his emotions afterwards, and none of them the things he had ever wanted or expected himself to be.

Lying in Will’s arms like a broken toy, he was enraptured, baffled, sore in so many places, his skin buzzing with continual pleasure as his body had been made a monument to the memory of their lovemaking. The ache in the place where he had once been virginally tight, the shining bruises, handprints and bite marks, the scratches on his back, they made him shiver in joy and cling onto Will like a liferaft. This cheap bed in a random motel had become a terrifyingly immense stormy sea, ripping him from all of his moorings. For quite some time, he couldn’t speak. He thought he was still crying, but couldn’t be sure.

All he could feel, or wanted to feel was the welcome burn of Will’s sex-flushed skin beneath him; he inhaled deeply of the boy’s sweet fever and sensual musk, proud to find his flesh also bore the markings of his own cologne. But that wasn’t all he could feel, no matter how fiercely he tried to shut himself down to everything else.

The fear became so large, it threatened to swallow him whole, and finally Will murmured gently, “Come on, love, let me take care of you some more.”

Hannibal looked up at him, wide-eyed and puzzled.

He had never had someone inside him, never made love because he was falling in love. He had never let anyone call him “daddy,” certainly never said “baby,” and now he had done all of it without hesitation. He was about to submit to aftercare as he had submitted to the rest, and he worried that the tenderness would destroy whatever was left of him.

“I get the sense you’re not used to this bit, huh? Least not you being on the receiving end. But I’m afraid I really am gonna have to take care of you, Hannibal. Think you can stand it?”

I suppose we shall see.

He was in absolutely no condition to say no to Will Graham.

Will lamented that the tiny shower wouldn't suffice for a bath, but he got into it with Hannibal and laughed off the older man's quiet complaints at the cramped space.

"Don't worry, I'm good at fitting big things into tiny places," Will smirked, washing Hannibal so attentively, kissing all of his love-wounds, his eyes shining with happiness at the way he had marked his lover up, claimed his territory.

Hannibal laughed weakly at the joke and melted into the process of Will washing him. He was still half-hypnotized by the sight of Will naked, just by Will's presence in his life for that matter, the long period of time they had spent together when he'd been so sure he had ruined any chance of them being romantic by his absurd fearfulness during their first encounter. It dawned on him, as Will sat him on the bed dressed in his pajamas (they both were, and it felt achingly domestic) and called for take-out from the finest nearby restaurant who would deliver. Before Will carefully, slowly fed him his dinner, bite by bite of duck l'orange and crispy dill white and sweet potatoes, smiling and pressing kisses to his lips between bites, pouring them both some wine in paper cups and sucking the sweet taste off Hannibal's mouth delightedly.

He knew while he was waiting that he felt dependent on having nights like this always, together, and that he might not be able to bear this feeling much longer. His growing need for Will ballooned inside him so that he thought it would crush everything else, his ego, his meticulously curated lifestyle, his haughty disdain for vulnerability, being master of all he surveyed. How could he let those precious things go so easily, all for something so terrifyingly fragile that might end at any moment?

Any day now, and perhaps once Hannibal was far more attached, Will could wake up and decide it was over, Hannibal had ceased to please or fascinate him, and they would part; he would probably have to kill the boy in that case, but even if he did not, even if he had been made weak enough to let Will reject him and *live*, Will would be gone, and Hannibal with him, incapable of summoning a happy or hopeful emotion ever again.

He could not let this go so far, had to stop it like a bleed, be a surgeon again for this, this formidable danger looming over his destiny. He would have to find some way to be without Will, for the sake of his own sanity. But he couldn't bring himself to kill his sweet, incomparable boy; as a consolation prize to himself, he allowed himself the perhaps temporary measure of leaving Will alive. Giving himself the pointless hope that perhaps he would change his mind and feel strong enough to return to Will's arms, pathetic and weak enough to surrender once more to this sentimental addiction. It was the only way he could make himself leave.

Will was a clingy snuggler, and he talked in his sleep, adorable slurring comments jumbled by wild dreams; three times he sighed Hannibal's name and held him tighter in the dark, formerly anonymous room that had become their sanctuary. Hannibal could barely stand to unwind himself from Will's heavy embrace and creep from the room like a shadow. He left a note for Will that filled him with guilt, guilt which sat bitter on his tongue with agonizing, instant regret at his own coldness, the way he must force himself to be.

He still wanted to help Will with the Shrike case; his affection could not stand the thought of leaving Minnesota without also leaving Will a gift. A local farmer found the girl's corpse in

the morning, in a sun-soaked yet desolately cold field, mounted on antlers.

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Waking up alone was like a slap of cold water to Will's face. He thought he must be imagining it at first, but Hannibal was nowhere to be found; he'd taken his suitcase and just...fucking *gone*.

His stomach twisted in confused hurt feelings, and when he saw the note on the bedside table, he immediately regretted reading it.

I'm sorry Will, this is moving too fast for me. I need some space. -H.

Look at that exquisite, perfect cursive, twirled with a cheap plastic pen on a pad of "Moosehill Motel" paper. Will crumpled the note and flung it against the wall, refusing to let a single tear fall from his reddened eyes.

With prideful aggravation, he hauled himself into the day's work, grateful when he soon ran into Jack in the motel lobby for check-out.

Well, grateful until he remembered about all the damn noise he and Hannibal had made last night. That had been pretty short-sighted, considering that Jack was staying in the same motel and the place wasn't all that big.

"Did you, uh, get a good night's sleep?" Will asked awkwardly.

"White noise app on my phone and excellent headphones," Jack smiled, unfazed by the question. He obviously hadn't heard a thing; Will felt some relief on this count, at least. "I always sleep like a baby on these trips."

Will's supervisor scanned the small lobby expectantly. "Where's Dr. Lecter, isn't he coming along today?"

"He had to leave suddenly, head back to Baltimore to deal with a patient in crisis," Will lied, wishing that was the real reason. If Hannibal *had* to leave abruptly, it'd be nice to have it be the result of anything except escaping Will's arms.

Jack sighed in mingled annoyance and suspicion at the lame excuse. "Well, that certainly was sudden."

The awkward conversation ended when Jack's phone rang with news of another murder, and by the time they got to the field, Will's head was killing him. The crime scene annoyed him, some transparent copycat mocking the Shrike's M.O.

"The real killer has no interest in, in field kabuki!" he insisted to Jack, flame-cheeked with indignation at this wretched day, following on from possibly his favorite night of all time. A rude awakening, indeed.

Jack looked unconvinced, so Will raged on, "He has a house somewhere in the woods, or a cabin -- some place with an antler room." He began ticking traits off his fingers as they

popped into his mind like magic, as if compelled into crystallization by the sight of the latest corpse. As if this copycat killer had to show him the negative so that he could see the positive.

“He has a daughter,” Will insisted, “She’s leaving home -- he can’t bear to lose her. She’s his golden ticket.”

The clues cascaded from the black-blurred blue skies in his mind like manna and led him finally to the correct former workplace, the right file of addresses, and the home of Garret Jacob Hobbs, an ordinary contract construction worker, but so much more.

***

Will rang the doorbell at the Hobbs house and cursed himself for not buying a second bottle of aspirin at the airport. He couldn’t wait to get this over with and get home to dive into bed and pull the covers up over his head, possibly for the rest of time.

But he knew this was the place, and he wasn’t about to let his personal angst distract him from putting a stop to these murders of innocent young girls. Time to end this once and for all and impale the Shrike on the antlers of his justice.

As it happened, the golden ticket herself opened the door. He was face to face with an endearingly vivacious college aged girl with wind-chafed cheeks and shining auburn hair. He had a weird feeling (but then, when did he *not* lately?) as if they had already known each other a long time.

“Hi, I’m Agent Will Graham with the FBI, I need to ask your dad some questions,” he greeted quietly and casually, flashing his badge; no need to get anyone worried or afraid by his arrival.

The girl crinkled her nose. “FBI? What’s it about?”

“Just some routine questions. Can you go get him?”

“He’s in the middle of making dinner and I don’t want him to burn it, why don’t you just come in,” she suggested with a shrug.

Will could tell she was really unsettled by his presence but cleverly sought to act like it didn’t bother her at all.

He trailed the girl to the kitchen where her father, a gaunt, blank-faced man with chilling eyes, was cooking sausage and eggs. Across the room, Hobbs’ wife was getting out plates and silverware. Just another night, another family dinner. Will felt an odd, fleeting twinge of regret that he had to tear the disguise of Hobbs’ goodness away forever. He analyzed the room and its occupants, sussing out any potential mishap that might occur from him showing up like this.

”Who was at the door, Abigail?” her father asked lightly.

“Dad, this is Agent Graham with the FBI, he said he’s got to ask you some questions,” Abigail chirped, unprepared when her father abruptly dropped his spatula, his dead eyes locking on Will’s face with silent shock and immediate planning.

Oh, God, he’s going to--

Hobbs lunged for the butcher knife on the center island and grabbed out for his daughter’s arm. If he was about to be stopped, he had to finish this first, had to kill Abigail.

I don’t think so. Will put a single bullet in Hobbs’ head and the man crumpled heavily to the floor, his hand falling from its clutch on Abigail’s shoulder.

The wife, Melinda, dropped the dishes to the floor with an almighty shatter and Abigail sank to her knees, staring in shock at her father’s dead body.

“Abigail,” Will sighed, “I’m so sorry, but I had to do that. He was going to kill you.”

Abigail nodded as tears streamed down her face. She reached out to touch her father as if to console his spirit, but dropped her hands before making contact. She looked up at Will with some kind of terrible acceptance. “I know. Thank you.”

***

She was a brave, strong girl. Jack was sure she knew about her father’s activities, might have even been helping him commit the murders. Will insisted this could not be the case; really he knew there was a decent chance Jack’s suspicion was valid, yet what would be solved by punishing Abigail for her involvement? She was a young, traumatized woman who had likely been too afraid to disobey her father, and Will just wanted her to have the time and space she needed to recover in a healthy way, with her mother’s support...to get the chance to see for herself, who she was and wanted to be.

“I’m going to be an FBI agent when I’m done with college,” Abigail informed Will when he took his leave of her, having accompanied her and Melinda from the police station where they had been questioned back home.

“I bet you are,” Will smiled. “Listen, if you’re ever looking for a mentor, feel free to look me up.”

Abigail took his card and thanked him again. Will hoped that if he ever had a daughter someday, she’d be like Abigail.

The flight home was mercifully uneventful, and when he got back home, he was glad for the distraction of a few pressing responsibilities that had to be taken care of. Otherwise, he probably would have surrendered to full-on depression over Hannibal, and his pride would never forgive him for that.

***

One Week Later

“Okay, I’m just gonna ask. What in the world is eating you, son?” Travis Graham set down his knife and fork and momentarily abandoned his ham dinner, giving his son a concerned look.

“Travis, don’t poke at him too much, he just got done with an exhausting case, he hasn’t been feeling well…” Maddie Graham frowned at her husband, who shrugged.

“Somebody hadda ask, he’s been sitting there staring at the wall for the last half hour…”

“He still has ears, though,” Will snarked, pointing to his ear. “I’m still here and able to converse, guys, even if I’ve been a little...off lately.”

“Is it about the Shrike case? Or are you still feeling under the weather?” Maddie asked, refilling all of their glasses of lemonade from a jug of fresh-squeezed in the middle of the table.

“Oh, it’s okay for you to ask,” Travis grumbled.

Will laughed, revived somewhat from his sullen mood by his parent’s good-natured bickering. With their thick Louisiana accents and laid-back manners, they never failed to help him relax, but his parents couldn’t fix his latest conundrum, even with their wisest advice.

“It’s neither, actually,” Will admitted. Hell, he might as well say it; they weren’t going to stop worrying about him until he stopped sulking, and that might not happen for months. *If ever.*

“It’s...well, I met this guy…”

“You’re seeing someone, honey? That’s wonderful,” Maddie enthused, immediately setting her glasses on her nose and reaching out her hand. “Pictures, please.”

“I mean, we’re not even dating,” Will sighed, rolling his eyes. Nonetheless, he took out his phone and showed his parents the photos of Hannibal which he had screen-shotted from the internet like a total stalker.

“*Dr.* Hannibal Lecter,” Travis repeated, raising his eyebrows, impressed.

“Ohhhh, a doctor,” Maddie grinned.

Will groaned and held out a hand. “Okay, gimme that back, don’t get too excited. Yes, he’s a doctor, and he’s accomplished, handsome, sophisticated, but he also dropped me like a hot potato just when we were starting to get really close, so. You know. That’s why I’m feeling…” He roved his hand in the air in front of his melancholy expression and his clothes, which had reverted to rumpled flannel. “Like this.”

The borrowed clothing from Hannibal was still neatly packed in the doctor’s suitcase, stowed in a corner of Will’s living room. He hadn’t figured out yet what he wanted to do with it -- return it, keep the clothes as the only vestiges he got to retain and obsess over from the whole torrid affair, what? There were no easy answers, which as the man who *always* had the answers when others, even experts, remained clueless, was infuriating.

“Maybe he just needs time,” Maddie suggested, and Will sighed.

“That’s what Beverly said, too.”

“I like that girl. She and I always agree.” Maddie gestured with her fork and Will cracked a weak smile.

“He did ask me for space, but he hasn’t bothered contacting me in seven days, three hours, forty-seven minutes and…”

“Will, if you tell me the number of seconds, you know I’m gonna have to get the Ben and Jerry’s,” Travis observed.

“Ugh, you may as well get it,” Will admitted. He glanced at the clock on the striped wallpaper of his parents’ dining room and added forlornly, “five seconds.”

As they all tucked into bowls of Cherry Garcia, Will reflected, “I feel like I’m getting my heart broken right when I finally realized how to use it. It just doesn’t seem fair.”

“One thing I know for sure is this,” Travis mused, “The Will Graham I raised doesn’t give up this easy. If you really care for this man, you owe it to both of you to try and work it out.”

“Call him up, talk to him,” Maddie put in, “What harm can it do?”

“Um, he might completely destroy me all over again and leave me needing another three pints of this,” Will suggested, nodding down at pink, chocolate-flecked ice cream. “Honestly, if Hannibal Lecter rejects me one more time, I think I’m gonna need this stuff in an IV.”

***

Still, his parents’ advice had been sound, and Will couldn’t get Hannibal off his mind without some chance for closure. He swallowed his pride and dialed the doctor’s number, standing out on his porch that night after he’d left his safe, happy parents in their cozy little house and returned to his own brand of rustic solitude.

The dogs played merrily in the yard as Will scowled accusingly at the way the phone rang three times. The nerve...if Hannibal let him go to voicemail…

He leaned his arms on the porch railing and felt the cold fall air penetrating his thin brown jacket, saw his breath puffing in front of him and just wanted to get this fucking over with. The serene sound of Hannibal’s voicemail greeting sent him right over the edge of annoyance and he blurted out his message accordingly.

“Hello, Dr. Lecter. This is Agent Will Graham. Maybe you remember me, maybe not, I really can’t tell from your *complete silence*. I still have your luggage and the clothes you let me borrow when you thought I was worth your time, so if you want them, you’re gonna have to come get them yourself. Otherwise, I’ll probably sell them on e-bay. *Bye!*”

With the sarcastically chipper farewell spoken, Will felt a grim satisfaction in at least lashing out. At least letting Hannibal know he didn’t get to shatter him like that and just move on

with his life like Will didn't even exist. He never expected to hear back from Hannibal, but whatever. This would have to be his closure.

***

Hannibal parked the Bentley in Will's driveway and marched up to his door, compelled by that provoking voicemail to come here and…

That much was uncertain. It would be courteous to offer an apology and explanation for his behavior; it would be most prudent and expedient to kill the young agent; it was most tempting to fall to one knee with an offer of marriage; it was most appealing to simply turn and run away while he still could, before Will answered the door.

But the dogs were barking inside, having heard the car and footsteps, and Will appeared before his eyes before Hannibal had the chance to make a decision or a cowardly retreat.

"What the hell are *you* doing here?" Will asked with a sullen pout that went directly to Hannibal's cock.

Will looked outrageously seductive, standing there in the doorframe wearing one of Hannibal's button-down shirts, a lavender one, with the collar wide open showing off his gorgeous neck and collarbones. That was all Will wore aside from a pair of grey boxer briefs which were barely visible under the hem of the shirt, so that Hannibal was subjected to the sight of his sexy thighs and legs, his ankles and bare feet. The boy's tempestuous hair was ruffled into a halo of discordant curls, and Hannibal could even see his nipples poking through the shirt in result of the frigid night and his scant attire. Worst of all was Will's bratty expression and the way his vivid eyes bore into Hannibal's very soul, making his palms itch to give him a good spanking for that obnoxious if justified voicemail and his attitude in the present.

"I came to discuss the charming voicemail you sent me earlier," Hannibal announced primly, holding on by a thread.

He was dressed formally, three piece suit under his finest winter coat, leather gloves and slicked back hair. They formed an almost comical contrast in appearance.

"May I come in?" he asked stiffly.

"I don't know, may you?" Will scoffed, turning to the dogs who were watching the scene like a soap opera. "Should I let him in?"

One of the dogs barked an assent and Will groaned. "Fine, you can come in, but only because Winston wants you to. By the way, it's probably just because he thinks you might have doggie biscuits."

Hannibal followed Will inside and shut the door behind him, accosted when he turned around to discover Will sitting on the kitchen counter, a single-portion plastic container of something orange and liquidy in his palm. He realized belatedly that Will had answered the door holding this unaccountable late-night snack.

“What on earth are you eating?” he inquired, peeling his gloves off and hanging up his coat on the hook by the front door.

“Mandarin oranges,” Will muttered, popping another moist, plump little orange slice into his mouth, then drinking the leftover juice right from the container.

“Did you eat a good dinner earlier?”

Will shot him an exasperated look. “I picked at the very nice dinner my Mom cooked. Seems I’ve been feeling out of sorts lately.”

“Are you blaming me for your dwindling appetite?” Hannibal asked with a disapproving shake of his head. “I would be more inclined to look at your workload at the FBI, in addition to your continued problem with headaches and --”

“I wouldn’t,” Will cut him off abruptly, his beautiful legs and naked ankles swinging from the counter; Hannibal was going to lose his mind any minute now.

He stepped closer and inhaled deeply, as subtly as he could, only to find Will smelled of Old Spice...and nothing else. Where was the encephalitis he had smelled on him before? He had managed to half-convince himself to prey upon the boy using psychic driving to worsen his symptoms and drive him to follow his darkest impulses. This had seemed like one possible solution to ensure Will was entirely co-dependent, too much so to ever leave him, but now…

“I’d been feeling sick lately, so I went to the doctor when I got back from Minnesota. We closed the case, of course, no thanks to you. And as it turned out, I had a rollicking case of encephalitis. I’m fine now; I just needed some meds, extra hydration and bed rest.”

Hannibal internalized his desperate frustration; he was not sure he did so very convincingly, as Will was staring at him in confusion.

“*What?*”

“Nothing,” Hannibal said, feeling intolerably foolish. “I simply...I wish I had known you were ill, I could have been there for you. But that is my own fault. I’m glad you are feeling better.”

“Damn right it’s your own fault. Is that all you came here to say, or did you come for your luggage? You want this shirt back, you can come get it yourself.”

Hannibal felt the same roiling wave of arousal course through him with each manifestation of Will’s petulance. “Don’t you have anything more substantial than that to eat?”

Anything, simply to change the subject before he burned to death on the spot with repressed desire. How he had missed his Will, so terribly, so miserably. He felt the boy’s presence like a drug running through his bloodstream and bringing him back to life.

“You’re such a snob. No, I don’t. Have a look around for yourself.” Will watched as Hannibal began exploring his fridge and cupboards, the older man’s disapproval growing with every discovery.

There was nothing in the fridge but homemade dog food, bologna and kraft American cheese, and French's yellow mustard, plus a half-pack of cheap light beer. Nothing in the cupboards but cups of instant noodles and a loaf of white bread that probably had high fructose corn syrup in it.

Hannibal gazed forlornly at the cheerful cartoon of a polar bear in a sailor cap on the bread package. "This is a dire situation, Will."

"I had some ice cream earlier," Will shrugged, "I'm fine."

"You've had nothing but sugar all night," Hannibal scolded him, enjoying the blush this brought to Will's cheeks. "If you can't be bothered to take good care of your nutritional needs, I'll just have to do something about it."

"Oh, really?" Will raised his eyebrows, his luscious lips forming a faux-innocent "o."

"Really. Stay right here, I will be back shortly." Hannibal went to retrieve his coat and gloves.

"Whatever," Will said to his back, his flat tone failing to conceal his curiosity.

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"I did not come here to lament of my neglect towards you, nor to retrieve my suitcase and clothing," Hannibal explained calmly about forty minutes later as he cooked a fancy omelette on Will's stove.

Will grabbed the whiskey bottle from atop the fridge and poured himself a glass, sighing heavily. "You came here to inspect my food stores and teach me how to make a pretentiously upgraded western omelette, then."

A fond smile ghosted Hannibal's lips. He flipped the omelettes into perfect fluffy folds and plated the meal, then carried the food to Will's little table and pulled out the younger man's chair.

Will dug into the omelette. "I resent how delicious this is."

"You most likely resent me as well," Hannibal reasoned. "With strong enough cause that I cannot blame you. Will, the truth is, I do not quite know why I am here. I'm still not prepared to enter into a serious relationship after so brief an acquaintance."

"The fucking nerve on you," Will snarled, so infuriated that it took Hannibal by surprise. He looked wounded and morally offended all at once. "How dare you? Condescending, gourmet bastard." He took another bite of his omelette and washed it down with whiskey.

"The level of arrogance it must take to sit there and act like I proposed marriage or something. We had two amazing nights together, and I had -- or have, who the hell knows -- feelings for you. I have a hard time making connections like that, and when you couldn't even bother to wake me up to say goodbye --"

“Will, I am sorry for leaving so abruptly.”

“No you’re not, just shut up, will you?” Will finished his food and shoved his chair back, carried his plate to the sink and practically hurled it in. “You want to have your cake and eat it too, but I’m not that kind of guy. Think I’m gonna sit by the phone just hoping you call, saving myself up for your scraps of attention?”

“I have no such ludicrous expectation.” Hannibal stood and went closer to Will, who was fuming by the sink. “I merely wished to make amends--”

“It’s too late for that! You’ve ruined everything, and you don’t even have anything to say for yourself. We could have been great together, and you’re treating us like some forgettable footnote.”

“I am not--”

“Yes you are! I don’t have a blowtorch powerful enough to melt the ice around your heart; you’re so hellbent on protecting yourself from, God forbid, experiencing a human emotion. Just leave, why don’t you, that’s what you’re good at.”

“Please cease in this immature snapping at me,” Hannibal insisted sternly. He took another step closer to Will, who didn’t move an inch.

“No.” Will’s eyes blazed at him, his jaw tight.

“You lay all of the blame for this scenario at my door, yet you are the one who so blatantly pursued me after I declined your initial offer of a date…”

“Don’t try to do that,” Will said crossly, and Hannibal could not control how aroused he was becoming with every chance he had to make Will more aggravated; the intensity and how beautiful Will was when angry, it was too irresistible. “This isn’t my fault, this is *your* fault. You started it, not me.”

“I started nothing,” Hannibal said, agitation and excitement making his heart race. He took another step closer to the intoxicating boy, who turned to face him full-on and had the further audacity to point at him.

“Sure, I asked you out in Jack’s office. But *you* shouldn’t have been looking at me like that. Especially if you didn’t want me to want you.”

“Looking at you in what way, exactly?” Hannibal felt hot all over, tense and uncomfortably aroused.

“The same way you’re looking at me now.” Will gave him a cold, but clearly hurt smile. “Like you’ll eat me alive. As if you’ll peel me out from myself, pluck out every well-guarded secret from my armor and keep me all for yourself. You’re a forest fire and you want to consume me so we can burn together. But you’d rather make us both suffer by playing pathetic games that would be childishly out of line on a Tinder chat.”

“You’re behaving like an insolent brat,” Hannibal accused, glowering.

Will stepped closer this time. “That’s right I am. But guess what, I’m *your* insolent brat, Daddy. For some reason, you just don’t wanna admit that.”

Hannibal burst forward, yanked Will into a searing kiss, then swept him right off his feet and carried him up to bed. Will, in total shock, had barely begun to return Hannibal’s bruising kisses when he was unceremoniously flung onto the bed. He just stared with his mouth hanging open while Hannibal tore -- literally tore, there were buttons flying everywhere -- his pristine suit off and then loomed, naked, glorious and predatory above him, glaring down at Will’s blushing face and awestruck expression.

“Is this what you wanted?” Hannibal hissed.

He roughly tossed Will onto his stomach, then yanked his underwear down and used the same merciless grip on Will’s hips to shove his ass into a fully displayed position for the taking.

Hannibal pulled hard on Will’s curls to expose his neck, then bit and sucked wildly at his tender flesh, reversing the places where his older bruises had faded. His warm, smooth skin was Hannibal’s chosen canvas, his beautiful body the only home he’d been craving every moment since their parting. Like an animal, he dragged his aching erection obsessively between Will’s ass cheeks, groaning as excited, desperate perspiration dotted both their skin, precum dripping from Hannibal onto Will as pleasure pummeled him from this simple act of foreplay.

“Yes,” Will moaned, leaning into the hot, obscenely wet licking kisses which Hannibal laid crudely on his lips, “Yes you idiot. I want you to take what’s *yours*. Give me what’s *mine.*”

“Already so spoiled.” Hannibal pulled his big hand back and treated Will’s exquisite, pert little ass with a brisk, rough spanking that made the filthiest moans cascade from his overkissed and bitten lips.

“Yeah, well, sex with you is enough to spoil anyone -- ahhhh, Jesus *Christ*, Hannibal--”

Hannibal smirked with a lethal, menacing glint in his eyes, then resumed what he had started, laving his wet, soft tongue with desperate hunger all over Will’s pretty hole, opening the boy with the same blend of expertise and unhinged passion that kept driving Will right out of his mind with bliss.

When Hannibal had added lube to the equation, driving two thick fingers right to Will’s prostate and alternating each inward glide with a harsh spank to his shaking, pink cheeks, Will exploded into helpless sudden orgasm, his cum splashing the sheets below him while he grabbed the bedding in a vain effort to center himself. He would have crashed on his wobbling legs in the unbelievable rush of pleasure, but Hannibal held him up insistently and pushed his cock in without warning.

Will’s orgasm was still vibrating through him with a shocking thrum of bliss, so that when Hannibal’s huge cock entered him it intensified his sensations and he let out a near-wall-shaking mewl.

Hannibal tsked. “I didn’t say you could come, naughty boy, so you deserve to be fucked with no warning,” he shoved his hips forward recklessly, pressing every thick inch of himself into Will’s tight walls, his breath sputtering as his hair fell haphazardly in his face. “No extra lubrication. But you like it, don’t you? I thought you were loud in the motel--”

“*I love it,*” Will cried out, tears of joy flowing freely down his red face. Hannibal clutched his hip so hard it hurt and would leave fingerprints on his skin; his other hand flew up to grip and squeeze Will’s throat.

“Brat,” Hannibal chided, thrusting fiercely. “My -- pretty -- spoiled -- naughty -- little brat.”

Will would have answered in the affirmative for all of the above, but he couldn’t get a word out with the chokehold Hannibal had on him. The pressure on his throat, the thrill of danger had a second orgasm building inside him, his body screaming at the oversensitive feeling of having his prostate pleasured again so soon.

“Look how good you are, how well you take your punishment.” Pride shone through Hannibal’s raspy voice, his accent thickened by lust. Releasing his throat, Hannibal slid into Will much more slowly, then paused with his hips pressed tight to Will’s ass, just allowing them both to feel his immense cock buried so deep inside Will. The curve of his hairy belly bumped Will’s sensitive skin and the boy whimpered with erotic joy.

When Hannibal pulled out of him after that, Will thought he might die, but thankfully he didn’t have to wait long for more. The doctor flipped him onto his back, flung his legs over broad shoulders and slid back in at a new angle that let their eyes lock, Hannibal’s full of a longing, devastating and deep as his thunderous thrusts into Will, the younger man’s eyes open and glittering with need.

Will grasped Hannibal’s ass tight enough to leave new marks of his own, endeavoring to have all of him as deep as he could get him, and the older man crushed their bodies together to messily lash his tongue over Will’s mouth, dripping saliva into it, slamming into him with feral grunts.

“Did you really think I didn’t miss you?” Hannibal panted, and Will nodded from within his pleasure-glazed dizziness.

“I didn’t-- think you cared,” Will blurted amidst his whimpers of ecstasy.

The boy’s body was tight, heavenly perfection, his words so sad they agonized Hannibal, bringing his continued indecision back into focus.

“That was very naughty of you. Bad boy,” he sighed, reaching down to stroke the small bulge in Will’s low belly under which his cock was buried.

The strange savagery of the gesture made Will throw his head back with a broken wail as he came again, coating his belly.

Will went on trembling and moaning while Hannibal fucked him through the euphoric waves and then gritted out, “I’m giving you what’s yours now” right before he emptied into Will

with a loud exclamation in Lithuanian.

It didn't seem like the world would continue its normal functioning after something like that, or at least Hannibal fancied everything should have been burning down around them, singed to blackening by this overwhelming and frightening passion. But time resumed, even background noise came eventually back into focus from its fuzzy lapse into the oblivion of his and Will's moans.

He lay exhausted on his back and Will curled against him, trusting as a child. The dogs were barking in confused alarm at all the noise, and Will chuckled, kissing Hannibal's chest. "I should go calm them down. And well, I *really* need to clean myself up a little."

The boy climbed from the bed on still shaking legs, looking as delicious as ever walking away with his scratched-up back and bruised ass. Hannibal was left with only his bullet thud rapid heartbeat and his fears for a few minutes of bewilderment.

Then Will returned with two glasses of whiskey and a smile, and Hannibal's heart melted.

The agent got back into bed and sat with his back against two propped up pillows and his legs tossed over Hannibal's. He passed Hannibal a drink and said, "Well, cheers to whatever that was."

"Cheers," Hannibal smiled, pathetically besotted. He sipped the spicy liquor thoughtfully. "Whatever that was, for me, it was...so extraordinary that my usually adroit descriptive phrasing is now failing me entirely."

"I made your brain malfunction," Will grinned. "I'll take that. So, do you want your shirt back now?" He plucked playfully at the manhandled button-down in which he'd been fucked, and Hannibal laughed huskily.

"It looks much better on you." Hannibal ruffled Will's curls and the younger man gave him an equally infatuated look. "But nothing looks better on you than me."

"There, we can agree." Will surveyed him archly, from where he sat slightly above. With a mischievous twitch of his smile, he tipped his glass down and dribbled whiskey onto Hannibal's chest, then left a line of amber liquid running down his stomach. "*Oops.*"

"You aren't fooling anyone, you incorrigible -- oh, Will…" Hannibal closed his eyes and sank a hand into Will's sex-mussed hair as the boy licked up the mess with insatiable delight, lavishing his clever tongue over the older man's nipples, then down his abdomen, moving steadily lower…

"Just thirsty, Daddy," Will smirked, soon applying himself with shameless fervor to getting Hannibal hard again.

Once he had, Will lubed himself up again and sank onto Hannibal's cock, gripping the headboard on either side of the doctor's head before riding the man with ardent, moaning insistence.

Neither of them lasted long this time; Will knew Hannibal wouldn't by the way he held onto his back for dear life, too overwhelmed with delirious pleasure to hold out, and since Will happened to know just the right spot to get Hannibal to hit with every breathtaking stroke, he came at the same time, pulling the headboard so hard it almost disconnected from the bedframe.

They lay in a sweat-drenched, snuggling daze afterwards, until finally Will murmured sleepily, "I don't expect you to be here in the morning, but don't leave yet."

"Why do you assume I won't be there?" Hannibal rubbed his back, his brow knitted.

"Because," Will sighed before drifting into a heavy sleep, "You already made me breakfast."

I am right beside you

Chapter Notes

The song for this chapter is "In This Life" by Chantal Kreviazuk 😭💕

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will hummed woozily, half-asleep in bed as Hannibal's warm lips brushed his forehead. "Whahh-time is it?" he mumbled, instinctively reaching his arms out to bring his lover closer. Even with his eyes shut, he could tell it was still dark in the room.

"Five o'clock," Hannibal murmured, laying on his side next to Will and caressing his face. "I have several morning appointments and need to leave by seven. But I did not want to depart again without letting you know."

"Oh?" Will squinted at him in the shadowy room, smiling in relief. "Okay. Thank you."

"I've made coffee and I'll soon bring you breakfast," Hannibal proposed. "I can make some more omelettes in a slightly different variation of last night's recipe."

"You don't have to make some big, elaborate breakfast." Will snuggled his face into Hannibal's neck with a happy sigh. The older man smelled of coffee and Will's piney bath soap, and damn, that turned him on. "If you go in the lower cabinet in the kitchen, there's a box of Fruity-O's."

"Are you entirely addicted to tooth-rotting sugary foods, my dear?" Hannibal looked at him so fondly that Will blushed and bit his lip. "Perhaps that is because you are so sweet yourself."

Will played with Hannibal's soft, silky hair, brushing the silvery strands which had fallen over his brow back behind his ear. "Someone woke up on the suspiciously upbeat side of the bed this morning. But flattery will get you everywhere, Daddy. You probably noticed by now that where you're concerned, I'm easy like that."

"Pleased to hear it." Hannibal beamed, but he still seemed nervous. "I still can't allow you to consume those dreadful orbs of Purple 7 and Pink 5. Omelettes will be up shortly. And afterwards, if you have any sort of healing ointment, I should like to tend to your derriere...I realize I treated it rather roughly last night."

Will raised his eyebrows. *Keep talking like that and you'll be* tending to my derriere *again in about thirty seconds.*

Mistaking Will's lustful lapse into silence for rejection, Hannibal blurted awkwardly, "Unless, of course, you'd rather go back to sleep. I'll leave you in peace, if that is the case.

Perhaps I should not have assumed you would wish…"

Will pulled him lazily into a hot, slow kiss, then released him with a cat-like smirk of total contentment. "I'd love to have breakfast before you have to go. You know I love your cooking and your company. And there's a salve in the bathroom I use for calluses and dry skin. I think that would do the trick...I *am* a little, um...delightfully sore."

Looking relieved, Hannibal sighed and ran his hands down Will's back over the borrowed, half-mangled lavender shirt. "Good boy. Just relax here for a little while and I will see to everything."

"Thank you, Daddy."

Will lay there in stunned, elated disbelief when Hannibal headed back to the kitchen. He heard his lover feeding the dogs, then going outside with them for a few minutes, and guiding them back in with relative ease. Next came the sound of pots and pans, soon followed by savory and delicious breakfast food scents.

He hadn't even expected Hannibal to still be here, and just having the doctor wake him up briefly to say goodbye would have been enough to soothe Will's worries about commitment phobia or unrequited intensity of feeling. But he was even going to make breakfast and tend to Will's aftercare…

Will warned himself against what his mother always called "the danger of being too thankful to a man for just doing what he's supposed to do," which in her opinion could lead to having low expectations for one's partner. As a couples counselor, Maddie had certainly witnessed enough of these sorts of relationships over the years that her advice carried the usual weight of well-earned wisdom.

A bar set too low could encourage said partner to do the least amount of work possible in the relationship to ensure his happiness and their mutual comfort. Plus, in today's toxic dating environment, it was way too hard to find someone who even *did* the bare minimum -- and to find someone so capable and intoxicating who actually reciprocated the attraction on any level -- Hannibal was potentially a unicorn, a holy grail in a universe otherwise barren of romantic prospects for one Agent Will Graham. And he was once again in distinct danger of getting *way* too invested, far too soon.

So why did caring too much about Hannibal keep feeling so damn good?

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"I meant to ask you how it felt, bringing the Shrike to justice?" Hannibal inquired softly as he gave Will a brain-meltingly wonderful massage with the salve.

As the doctor's large, capable hands worked magic on Will's love-bruised flesh and his muscles that were tired from long hours of work, Will sighed in pleasured distraction.

"Well…" He made himself focus, which was a difficult task. Hannibal's fingers were so strong, finding every pressure point to relieve tension until Will thought he was going to

dissolve into blissful relaxation.

He also had to remind himself to downplay the pleasure he'd taken in shooting Hobbs, the same way he was going to have to hide it from the therapist during his work-mandated post-kill-shot therapy session that afternoon. Normally, it was easy for Will to smoothly lie about his murderous hobby, but between his natural desire to be more open with the man he was falling for, and the almost narcotic effect the massage was having, the challenge felt much stronger. He preferred to use a kernel of honesty than to lie outright.

"I felt like it was over so fast," he recalled, omitting the familiar, delighted head-rush of the kill itself. "It almost felt anticlimactic, which might sound terribly insensitive of me."

"Not at all," Hannibal reasoned, sweeping his hands up Will's back to massage his neck and shoulders. "You'd been working on the case for over a month, exhaustedly. To have it all stop short must have felt something akin to a train abruptly reaching the end of the tracks."

The creamy-sweet scents of coconut and cocoa oil from the salve were making Will more inclined to fantasizing they were on an island vacation than wanting to delve into a topic that might reveal some of his darker secrets that were, for now, best left hidden.

"Yeah, something like that." Will closed his eyes and relaxed his body into the bed. He was still nice and warm from the bubble bath they had shared, and naked with Hannibal's hands all over him...he could definitely get used to this.

"You ever kill someone?" he dared to ask, opening one eye to squint over his shoulder briefly at Hannibal's face.

The doctor looked calmly curious, not offended in the least. "As I mentioned, I used to be a surgeon. I had my share of patients die under my care, but one in particular bothered me to the extent I stopped practicing medicine."

"You're a perfectionist. Psychology must be an easier medium for you, since the success rate is so much higher: most of your patients don't come to you with a terminal condition."

"A perfectionist?" Hannibal repeated amusedly, though a more serious rumble in his tone indicated some deep thoughts that resulted from Will's quickly adept analysis. He leaned in to murmur warmly in Will's ear, "*Me*?"

Will laughed. "So I guess you transferred your passion for anatomy into the culinary arts? All those extravagant dishes using cuts of meat I've barely heard of…"

"That's not the only manner in which I like to indulge my passion for anatomy." Hannibal smirked, finishing the massage.

Will sat up and took Hannibal's hand, lacing their fingers together. "Apparently." He grinned, then added after a thoughtful pause, "Are you a perfectionist about relationships too?"

"Concerned I may run away again?" Hannibal raised his light brows.

He looked charming in a snug pair of Will's sweatpants and the only shirt Will had big enough to fit him, a Virginia State U sweatshirt from his college days that hung off one of his own shoulders when he wore it, but clung to Hannibal's broader physique. He just looked so beautifully soft and domestic, Will almost wanted to cry.

"Well…" Will broke eye contact and looked down at the floor, feeling even more naked all of a sudden.

"And perhaps even when you least expect it? I have to admit that relationships have never been my strong suit, Will. This is all new to me. And I can be...ever so slightly...sometimes I feel greatly concerned about your acceptance of my more unusual qualities...those that might appear rather eccentric…"

Will met his gaze again, cautious, trying to understand. "Are you saying that you're strange, and worried I might eventually reject you because of that?"

"On my best and worst days, which are often one and the same depending on one's interpretation...I can be far more than strange." Hannibal spoke with a wry humor blended in seriousness that felt poignant, making Will very aware these words were not easy for him to share. His pride must be making any mention of his insecurities deeply uncomfortable.

"I'm strange, too." Will lifted Hannibal's hand and kissed it, pondering some potential further replies he'd love to give right now.

I'm falling so hard for you, and it's because of your strangeness, your beauty and mystery, how intense and overwhelming you are to behold, and to hold in my arms. I would never judge you, and I'm beginning to worry I'm incapable of rejecting you, no matter how you treat me. I'm scared, but I'll keep coming back because I can't help it. You're the air I breathe. All I want is to make you feel safe in this love, to make you happy. But I can't say any of this, because it might send you running for the hills.

"All I can really think to say to you now is, I can wait for a while to define this, as long as you're honest with me." Will pressed his lips together, thinking carefully, before he added, with his cerulean eyes open and truthful, locked to Hannibal's fascinated expression, "If you quit running away from me, I'll try to stop running *at* you quite so fast."

"And then perhaps we can meet in the middle?" Hannibal suggested with a tentative smile.

Will nodded, trying to be satisfied with such a healthy, non-co-dependent, *slow* and sensible approach. *If this is what Hannibal needs…*

What about what I need? How am I gonna hold back or be patient enough?

"That's the idea," he said with a slightly forced smile.

"It's asking you to be very patient." Hannibal was suddenly very much occupied with fidgeting, tugging and otherwise examining the perfectly boring grey sleeves of his sweatshirt, once again fleeing Will's incisive observations, intimidated by the emotional intimacy between them.

“Well, what can I say?” Will gave him a goofy grin, kissing his flushed cheek and ruffling his hair. “I’m kind of into you.”

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“‘*I’m kind of into you*?’” Will repeated that afternoon to Dr. Hawkins, the FBI therapist responsible for evaluating his fitness for duty after the Hobbs shooting. “Who says that? Out of every possible thing I could have said, why do I come out with...an SWV lyric from the 90s?”

“The SWV lyric is ‘I’m *so* into you.’” Dr. Hawkins was a down-to-earth man, perhaps a decade older than Will, with a neat salt and pepper beard. He wore rock band t-shirts under his tweed blazer and was easy enough to talk to that Will took advantage of the chance to air his more pressing issues, never mind about the boring *“oh no, my God I shot and killed someone!”* routine.

“Jesus!” Will buried his face in his hands. “Even the pop song is better composed than what I said. ‘I’m kind of into you’? He’s not a limited edition flavor of Pringles! But on the other hand, really what was I supposed to say instead? Couldn’t say, ‘I’m crazy about you, can’t stop thinking about you’ or any of the other true sentiments that occurred. Any of those are liable to scare him away again.”

“It sounds to me as if this man you're interested in is much more held back by his own preexisting issues than any behavior you’ve manifested towards him.” Dr. Hawkins glanced at his watch and added, “However, since we’re actually here to talk about your kill shot on the Hobbs case, do you think we might get to that before time runs out on our session?”

“Oh, of course,” Will said hurriedly, annoyed but cloaking it in a polite smile. “About that.”

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“He said that he’s ‘kind of into’ me,” Hannibal explained to Dr. Bedelia Du Maurier at his own therapy appointment, which took place in her elegant home.

Dr. Du Maurier observed the shy little smile that lit up Hannibal’s usually much more severe and unflappable features. Hannibal chose to ignore the slight look of amusement she wore, almost a “how the mighty have fallen” expression. He needed her insight, so he must control his own small annoyances.

“That seems to please you. And yet you have made a point of keeping Will Graham at a distance. You crave the way this young man can see the truth of you and want to keep looking, but you keep pulling back whenever emotional intimacy beckons.”

“I don’t know that he sees the truth of me.” Hannibal picked at a nonexistent piece of lint on the knee of his blue striped suit. “I don’t know that I’m brave enough to show him.”

“It was brave enough for you to admit that to yourself, and to me. You’re making real progress here, Hannibal, you should be proud.” Bedelia looked, much to her own surprise,

really rather proud of him, too. Or perhaps simply relieved he had a new distraction in his life.

After all, she wouldn't want him to be overly focused on her own recent ordeal with a patient which had led to her early retirement. As her only remaining client, Hannibal was very aware that he retained this status from the good Dr. Du Maurier's fear of any repercussions that might result from breaking off the relationship. However, he had no intention of killing her anytime soon, since her brilliant understanding of psychology from the perspective of someone willing to commit murder herself was hugely valuable to his ongoing ordeal in understanding Will Graham's impact on his life.

"It is difficult to be proud when I am feeling so particularly...exposed." Hannibal folded his hands on his lap and shifted posture, unable to get comfortable despite the perfectly soft and accommodating chair. "It is as if Will Graham has the ability to make me...feel…"

"Yes, I believe that is the crux of the entire issue." Bedelia flipped a glossy strand of ice blonde hair over one shoulder of her impeccable beige suit jacket.

With her petite legs crossed in front of her and her rail-precise posture, anyone else might be fooled into thinking her incapable of fearing her patient. Hannibal could read her smaller tells, the anxious microexpressions and occasional glances around the room as if evaluating its safety in case she ever needed to quickly escape his presence. And he enjoyed these signs of her fear, along with the faint scent of it mixed with her lovely perfume. However, as opposed to his former enjoyment, which had been laced with half-interested flirtation, sadistic entertainment, and the inflation of his ego as an uncatchable killer, Hannibal now found them more important as confirmation he was not the only one in the room experiencing an unwanted vulnerability.

"You're not used to *feeling* in this particular shade, texture, and immensity," Bedelia concluded thoughtfully. "Your challenge then becomes, whether to accept or flee from the unusual opportunity with which Will Graham presents you."

"I rarely encounter the chance to begin a close friendship," Hannibal admitted, "Much less…" He took a deep breath, then managed to force the words out: "Will Graham presents me with the opportunity for love."

"Excellent, Hannibal," Bedelia said with a cordial smile, her voice as warm as it ever got. "Perhaps the next time you approach Will Graham, you might try it in a setting where you feel more control over the environment and its developments. It could reduce your anxiety."

"Are you suggesting that I am a control freak, Dr. Du Maurier?" Hannibal cast her an amused smirk, still reeling a bit inside over his profession of "falling in love" with Will Graham. Of being *anxious*, in some doubt of a return...he was again in uncharted waters, and naturally sought control.

"It takes one to know one. You can admit that some of your panic during the previous encounters with Will came from the element of surprise. I think we might also conclude that the unpredictability has excited you in equal measure. But you are overwhelmed."

Hannibal sighed. All of this talk about him being "overwhelmed," "panicked," et cetera was becoming tiresome. Sometimes he missed his old self, the one who never felt these things, but that person felt like a mere robot, or to use Bedelia's term, a "person suit," compared with this more vividly alive man he now felt himself to be. There was no turning back, no matter how many times he ran from Will.

The evidence he had gleaned thus far of Will's potential interest in joining his murderous pursuits had been encouraging. The agent showed a certain coldly casual attitude about the shooting of Garret Jacob Hobbs that greatly intrigued him, at the same time Hannibal was incredibly distraught to have missed seeing the event. He tried to imagine it, Will's brilliant lethal instinct and insistent drive for justice, that *hunger* sizzling under his lover's skin, perhaps it only required Hannibal's attentive, caring encouragement to bring him all the way where they both needed to go. Then Will would join him in the hunt and they would be truly bonded for life, inseparable. Then Hannibal would not be bogged down by worries about whether he would be fully accepted when his darkest, deepest truths were unveiled before Will's eyes. Their love would be free, wild and perilous, beautiful beyond belief.

"I'm uncertain how calm I can ever be when in Will Graham's presence," he confessed, voice straining at yet another intimation of weakness. "However, it may be worth a try, to see if I can find and keep the upper hand."

Bedelia looked far too amused and entertained, but she contained it well with her usual subtle range of expressions. "Well, you may try. Glass of wine?"

***

Will brought the rubber stamped proof of his sanity and stability right to Jack's office himself after the meeting with Dr. Hawkins.

"I could have told you this myself," he maintained as Jack took the paperwork with a martyr's sigh and placed it in the appropriate folder atop his overcrowded desk.

"You can't know everything, Will." Jack looked up at him discerningly. "Nobody can, not even me. That's why I don't make the mistake of putting my arrogance above the call of duty to ensure everyone I'm working with is in good health. I've made that mistake in the past, and I won't make it with you."

Will nodded, genuinely touched. "I appreciate that you care about my well-being. Sorry I tend not to show it very well. It's just…always been easier to act like I *do* know everything. People don't argue with me very often about it."

Even now, Will *had* been right that his frame of mind had not been negatively impacted by killing Hobbs. Hell, shooting the Shrike had been one of the few highlights of an otherwise distressing second stay in Minnesota. But it was good of Jack to want to make sure Will didn't end up like Miriam Lass, and Will was every so often aware he was lucky to have a boss like him.

Plus, Will had recently discovered he definitely didn't know everything. It had been an exhilarating, scary rollercoaster of a learning curve that might never end...if he was lucky

enough to keep having Hannibal in his life.

“Speaking of the gaps in my knowledge,” he segued, surprising Jack by sitting down when the supervisor had expected the meeting to be over now. “I’ve been wanting to pick your happily married brain about how to date someone who’s so grown and successful, it sort of intimidates you.”

Jack chuckled. “I guess it’s obvious that applies to my relationship with Bella. I used to feel like she was way out of my league, but that never stopped me.”

“How did you get over that feeling?” Will rubbed his stubbled chin, deep in thought.

“One day Bella told me she felt the same way about dating me, and we laughed about it. That’s falling in love, Will. You’ve really never been in love before meeting Dr. Lecter?”

“Never ever,” Will shrugged. “I’m realizing I don’t know a damn thing about it, and even less about courtship.”

“Just go with your gut,” Jack advised. “Don’t try to play games, don’t hide behind excuses for pretending to feel less than you do. Don’t disrespect his boundaries or push him when he needs space. Sometimes he’ll just need you to listen without judging, and that’ll be the greatest gift you can give. And in the meantime…”

“Yeah?” Will asked, intently focusing on every sage word of advice, craving the wisdom. Really, he should be writing this down.

“Try flowers. Bella likes flowers. Now get out of here, I’m busy.” Jack put his reading glasses on and picked up another folder.

“I’m gone. Thanks, Jack!” Will showed himself out with an extra bounce in his step. He was going to find a way to successfully court the intimidating Dr. Hannibal Lecter, if it was the last thing he did.

Chapter End Notes

Next time: an eventful night at the opera! Jealous!Will *and* Jealous!Hanni! And the murder courtship will begin... 🖤

Wanna make you feel wanted

Chapter Notes

> The song for the chapter is "Wanted" by Hunter Hayes, and a little hint of the lyrics snuck into Will's thoughts 💕

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Part Two: Everybody wants you

It took Will long enough to find the perfect suit, and then he was so nervous he almost left the house with the price tag still dangling from the sleeve. *That* would have made for an interesting entrance to the Baltimore arts and culture scene.

Hannibal had invited him to come to the opera, and Will had gone right ahead and imprinted upon this date the idea that it would be their momentous night, the one that solidified their official status as a couple, his chance to prove to Hannibal he could fit into the doctor's sophisticated, elegant world. That they were meant to be, and all sorts of other dreamy, obsessive sentiments right on par with decorating every one of his lesson plan books with "*Will Lecter-Graham*" alongside hearts with Hannibal's name in them. *Not* that he had been doing that, of course.

Of course not.

The florist was confusing. Maybe it was because on a Friday night, the place was packed with other people buying flowers for their dates, and Will had chosen the nicest shop en route to Hannibal's house. But damn, it was hard to find a place to stand long enough to get a good look at the arrangements of overpriced fresh blooms with everyone pushing past him and talking a mile a minute. Will was starting to really agree with Hannibal that discourtesy was "unspeakably ugly."

"Excuse me," he said exhaustedly to the nearest worker, a chipper young man with glasses and a bow tie who nodded with interest, his eyes flicking over Will in the dove grey suit with a black shirt underneath.

"*Please,*" Will pleaded, "can you put an end to my agonizing indecision and recommend an arrangement...sort of like what you would bring Count Dracula if you were Mina and it was your first time accompanying him out on the town?"

"Certainly, sir, I have just the thing!"

After a twenty minute wait in line, Will was finally the proud owner of an impressive bundle of dark, richly fragrant flowers, black sunflowers, chocolate geranium, hellebores, and dahlias which had been meticulously arranged as to size and height to perfect effect.

He was so pleased with his purchase, yet irritated to find he was now running late to pick Hannibal up. Will had wanted to sweep Hannibal off his feet with the whole "picking you up and bringing you flowers" routine, but it would be utterly spoiled if they missed the first act of the opera.

With his heart beating triple-time, Will ran from his hastily parked car to Hannibal's front door and rang the bell. He used the few moments before Hannibal appeared to compose himself and act like he hadn't been riling himself up for hours over this date, only to nearly sabotage it by taking too damn long at the flower shop.

Will had to make this special. Anyone could tell Hannibal he was gorgeous, brilliant, irresistible. He must get that all the time; there must be a constant line of eligible singles salivating at the mere idea of getting more of Hannibal's company, his kiss, his touch, someday his love. Will had to make it clear he was dedicated to romancing him, wrapping him up in passion such as nobody else could ever give him, making him feel so wanted that Hannibal never wanted to let him go. He wasn't used to putting this kind of effort into any relationship, and it was starting to make Will feel almost as tired as he was excited and anxious.

Part of him would have much preferred to back Hannibal inside the house, slam the door behind them, make love all night and cuddle till morning light, forget about everyone else in the world. Confess all his secrets, compel Hannibal somehow to condone his wickedness, seduce him into wanting to kill together, live his own wildest fantasies. It all felt too untouchable, impossibly ambitious.

Hannibal opened the door with an expectant smile, and Will was relieved he didn't seem upset with him for being late.

"Hi, I'm so sorry for being a little late, but it took me ages to get these," Will held out the flowers, unable to control the breathless way he was blurting.

Hannibal was speechless for a few beats, his eyes traveling with surprise from Will in the new suit to the stunning bouquet. He almost looked frightened, for some reason, or perhaps Will was imagining it. Still, Will's empathy rarely led him astray. Was Hannibal nervous about the date as well? He had seemed softly overwhelmed when they were in bed together the other morning after breakfast...maybe the crazy over-emphasis on this night wasn't one-sided.

"Thank you, Will, these are exquisite." Hannibal took the bouquet, then took the liberty of brushing a warm kiss to Will's cheek, his hand landing with proprietary firmness on Will's hip, centering the younger man with a quick rush of calming energy. "And so are you."

"Gosh," Will blathered, *holy shit, did I just say 'gosh'? I didn't even know I knew that word.* "You look amazing yourself."

And Hannibal did. He had on a sleek black tux that somehow made his cheekbones look extra sculpted and shiny. His hair hadn't been slicked back as usual, so that it rested neat but soft over his brow, and his lips were so plump and tempting when he licked them, his gold

rush eyes swallowing Will whole. In the twilight, standing on the front step, Hannibal's gaze was champagne glitter, but it was the milky lighting creating the shading, Will knew.

He'd seen those eyes turn chocolate brown and liquid amber in other settings, and it reminded him of how his own eyes tended to go from blue to grey or green. They were both chameleons in their own ways, masters of disguise, but could they let their facades fall away completely, if it meant they could both finally be whole? Had Hannibal been wandering listlessly through the world like Will until they met, so bored and hard to satisfy...and if so, could Will be lucky enough that he was the one person who fit his puzzle piece?

These thoughts were running roughshod over his confidence and making his mouth go dry. It occurred to him that they had been standing out on the steps staring at each other while Hannibal hesitated with the flowers in his hands for no particular reason.

"I suppose I should put these in water," Hannibal said, reviving to the present moment. Once that was done, and the bouquet placed in a position of honor in the middle of the dining room table, which made Will blush, they left for their night of culture and hopefully, romance.

***

Hannibal really should have been frustrated with Will for being late. In fact, he had started to worry the younger man wasn't coming, that Will had changed his mind or was "ditching" him -- after all, he'd done the same to Will in Minnesota, like a fool. He was too worried to even check his phone, because if there was a text saying Will wasn't coming, he'd be shattered, and so he did not see the text saying that Will was running a bit late but still on his way.

When the doorbell finally rang a half hour after Will's scheduled arrival time, he almost burst into tears. Instead, he squeezed his eyes shut and made himself take a few deep breaths.

Now here he was in Will's neat but hardly luxurious little car, and he felt as if he might as well be in heaven. Will looked like a dream in that new suit with his hair brushed back from his face, one rebellious curl escaping to nestle over his forehead. His eyes had been so brilliantly blue as he blushed like a good boy and handed over the lovely flowers, Hannibal's heart had skipped a beat that hadn't seemed to stop skipping since.

The soft sound of classic rock music played from Will's radio as the young man drove smoothly through the streets of Baltimore and found them suitable parking near the Lyric Opera House.*"Ohhh-oh, I would bleed to love her..."* the song playing seemed to match his mood, unsettlingly accurate. He would bleed to love Will Graham, any day of the week, and with pleasure. It took all of Hannibal's will power not to simply drag the gorgeous creature beside him into the backseat and pleasure him until their moans made them culpable for public indecency.

Will opened Hannibal's door for him and offered his arm, dapper and charming. "Anyone would think you go to the opera regularly," Hannibal smiled.

"I'll fool them all," Will joked, his eyes twinkling, although his grip on Hannibal's arm tightened slightly.

“You don’t need to fool anyone, Will.” Hannibal glanced at Will’s pensive profile, enamored with his adorable nose, his perfect jawline, that scruff he could easily remember rubbing roughly against his thighs and ass.

It had become a beautiful night, the stars overhead innumerable as Hannibal’s disordered emotions, and Hannibal couldn’t possibly predict how this evening would go. Bedelia’s suggestion of choosing a setting where he could feel more in control had been overridden by his complete obsession with Will Graham, just as everything in Hannibal seemed to shift to fit the desperate craving of late.

“You’ll have the attention of Baltimore’s most elite socialites the moment you walk into the venue, and I am sure they will not be able to peel their eyes from you all night,” Hannibal predicted.

“Mmmhmm, I’m sure -- because I’m with *you*.”

“Yes, that will be part of it.” Hannibal smiled, relaxing a little as he flirted. He loved to find the right words to make Will melt. “But the rest of their fascination will come as a result of how devastatingly handsome you look.”

Will’s pupils dilated and the sweet scent of dopamine wafting from his skin was intoxicating. As they reached the entrance to their destination, with polite opera patrons passing by to find their seats for the performance and quietly gossip about everyone else in attendance, Will squeezed Hannibal’s bicep and leaned up to whisper emphatically in his ear, “*Daddy.*”

It pleased and aroused Hannibal, his boy claiming him in public like this, yet with such divine secrecy between them. He wanted them to share all their secrets, down to the bone and further.

Smiling, he leaned into Will’s space and murmured, “*Baby.*”

Will looked as if he was going to say something sudden and unexpected, his face expressive of desire and elation, making Hannibal feel heat pooling in his low belly. He hung upon the moment, eagerly watching his lover.

“*Hannibal,*” piped up a lady with a shrill, imperious voice who had approached with a group of followers trailing behind her, looking for all the world like men and women in waiting upon her royal presence.

She was middle aged, with a dark bob haircut and blunt-cut bangs, wearing a ruby evening gown and a black fur wrap, and speaking to Hannibal with presumption earned by her status as a longtime, thoroughly cordial acquaintance.

“Mrs. Komeda,” Hannibal greeted warmly, turning from Will to clasp the woman’s outstretched thin hand. “Always such a delight to see you.”

“And for us to see *you,* Hannibal; it’s been far too long.” Mrs. Komeda spoke with that amusedly overwrought drama that made her such an entertaining fixture on the cultural scene. “But perhaps you’ve been busy lately.”

“I have indeed.” Hannibal smiled, brimming with pride as he gestured towards Will, who had stiffened beside him with a strange shift in his expression from happy to serious. “Allow me to introduce my very good friend Will Graham.”

***

Will could have screamed. *”My very good friend???!!!!"* What the hell was that all about? He tried to calm himself down as he shook hands with that obnoxious woman in the lowcut gown who talked to Hannibal like she owned him, like she’d simply known him for *ages* and he’d fall at her feet with the slightest beckon.

What’s he supposed to say, Will? This is my not-quite-boyfriend, my lover, my fuck buddy who is desperately and unrequitedly in love with me?

He cleared his throat. “So nice to meet you,” he said through gritted teeth and a fake smile.

“And you, Will,” Mrs. Komeda smiled with genuine kindness, surprising Will. “Hannibal deserves to have a date to these things who is worthy of him.” Turning back to the doctor, she added, as if Will wasn’t even there, “Your taste is flawless as ever. He’s lovely.”

Will felt like an accessory all of a sudden, and very damn petulant about it.

Hannibal nodded politely, almost as if accepting the compliment, like Will’s loveliness was merely a reflection of his own good taste. “As are you. Shall we?”

Then they were all walking inside like this was a community outing, sabotaging the intimacy of the date. Will sighed, intimidated by the posh theatre and all the overdressed patrons, the sparkling flow of elegant conversation on various opera companies, orchestras, and productions he had never heard of and had nothing to say about. Mercifully, the small talk in the front lobby was accompanied by wine, which Will almost gulped down to steady his mood. But he had a pretty high tolerance for alcohol, and one glass of wine wasn’t going to make him tipsy enough to relax.

“I hope you’ll enjoy the performance,” Hannibal enthused, looking clueless as to Will’s inner struggle. Fuck, now he was being cute again and it made Will’s aggravation towards him fade. “It’s one of my favorite pieces, and Lenora Delville is one of the finest sopranos in the country.”

“Great,” Will said, disappointed to find that instead of one of those pleasantly isolated boxes, their seating was amidst a vast sea of people.

He’d been nurturing a little daydream all day about going down on Hannibal during the show, and it had been one of his main reasons for expressing interest in attending the opera. Thoughts of sinking to his knees, resting his hands on Hannibal’s thighs and surprising him with a saucy look right before he slyly eased the zipper down and went to work...ideas about Hannibal having to smother his gasps as Will deep-throated him in the middle of the show with the passionate sounds of the opera pouring over them as Hannibal’s cum shot down his throat...it had been distracting.

This seating arrangement simply wasn't what Will had pictured at all.

He had spent so much time on sex fantasies, suit and flower selection that he had not so much as Googled the plot for this particular opera, and as a result had no idea what any of it was supposed to be about. When the show began, he could appreciate the remarkable vocal performances, the majesty and grandeur of the costumes and sets, but he couldn't make heads or tails of the story. Everything was in Italian, of course. It just seemed like a lot of people scrambling around and acting distraught about developments he couldn't quite fathom.

So Will ended up mostly staring at Hannibal's gorgeous profile, enamored by his transfixed expression and how deeply he enjoyed the performance. That was almost enough for Will to feel this night was more than worth it, until he happened to glance behind them and saw two young men who were *also* staring directly at Hannibal Lecter with infatuated looks on their faces.

How dare...Will bristled, just barely holding back from glaring at them or shooing them away with his hands. They were a few rows back, a portly bearded guy with an endearingly cheerful look about him, and a sharply intelligent and serious-looking companion with an eerie gaze, both of them in nicer suits than Will, and both for whatever reason fixated on Hannibal.

Was Will just another idiot spending all his time crushing on the amazing Dr. Lecter? This was getting beyond annoying. Exactly how many people were in love with Hannibal?

Intermission was a disaster. They had to go back to the lobby where Hannibal said he was going to get them a drink -- that much sounded good. Will couldn't wait for this ordeal to be over; his temples were pounding with irritated pain, sweat gathering on his palms with his quick, dark temper pulsating out at all the hangers-on, the socialites who immediately surrounded Hannibal at the bar and prevented him from being able to get back to Will right away. Everyone seemed to be intent on getting a little bit of Hannibal's time and attention, from Mrs. Komeda and her clique to the two young men he'd noticed earlier, who also shook Hannibal's hand and briefly conversed.

Will read Hannibal's face and decided he was mildly annoyed but patient towards the bearded man, intrigued and somehow concerned regarding his friend, not necessarily attracted to either. In fact, Hannibal wasn't flirting with anyone; he was just being flirted *with* and fawned over incessantly, and taking it like a pro, as if it happened to him on a constant basis just as Will had assumed.

And here was Will all alone in the middle of the lobby, watching the whole thing unfolding like another show in a foreign language he was shut out of. He couldn't be making more of a spectacle of the fact that he didn't fit in here, unless he got on top of the bar and started performing a striptease. At least *that* would get Hannibal's attention. Probably.

His pride couldn't bear for him to fail this test he had set himself, to prove he could belong in this fancy world; meanwhile, his frustration at feeling abandoned while he had to watch Hannibal bask in the glow of universal admiration had him very irked.

“Hey,” he said to a young woman in a glittering white evening gown who happened to pass by. “Would you do me a favor and stand here acting like I’m saying something really brilliant and then really funny and you’re totally charmed, just for a minute?”

Maybe if he could seem to be taking part in the buzz of conversation in the room, and if he had a chance to hit Hannibal with a zing of jealousy and frustrated possessiveness such as he’d been feeling since they arrived--

The young woman scoffed. “Why in the world would I do that?” She flounced away as Will stood there about ready to wring his hands.

By the time Hannibal came back, Will was at the end of his rope, especially at seeing that the two young men were still following the doctor like fanboys.

“Will, I do apologize for the delay in procuring your drink and returning to enjoy your company.” Hannibal gave him one of those knee-weakening smiles and handed Will his wine. Belatedly realizing that the two men were standing beside him and looking expectantly at Will, he added with strained patience, “This is a patient of mine, Franklyn, and his friend Tobias.”

“Pleased to make your acquaintance,” Tobias said, shaking Will’s hand a little too hard, looking him up and down with the unmistakable attitude of considering the profiler a rival.

Will looked back, his gaze equally steely. “Tobias. Franklyn.”

Franklyn was far more overt in his envious confusion. “Dr. Lecter, you never mentioned that you were seeing somebody. Whenever I see you at the grocery store, you’re always alone.”

Hannibal sighed. “Nevertheless, Franklyn, I do see people on a rather frequent basis. And now if you’ll excuse us, I believe I saw the lights flicker. Intermission is almost at an end.”

The lights hadn’t dimmed yet, but Hannibal clearly wanted to get away from Franklyn and Tobias. This made Will feel better, but he still felt an insurmountable need to release some of the angry tension which had become more than he could internalize.

“What was that all about?” Will whispered as they took their seats and the lights actually did begin to flicker. “That Franklyn guy was acting like a stalker.”

“Indeed, I’m afraid I will have to refer Franklyn to another psychiatrist soon, and do my grocery shopping at an alternate location. He’s far too interested in me, and not interested enough in his therapy.”

Will frowned. Hannibal shouldn’t have to put up with someone treating him like that, as if he owed Franklyn his love simply because he was loved. Maybe there was some element of that whole formula that made Will self-conscious about his own obsession for his lover, a connection which annoyed him even more. His temper and possessiveness were tangling, which was never a good sign for anyone in his crosshairs.

“And Tobias?” Will asked quietly.

Hannibal gave an elegant shrug. “I’ve never met him before this evening. I gather he’s a violinist and music instructor of some local repute.”

“He seems quite taken with you.”

Hannibal smiled and looked Will over carefully before taking his hand on the armrest between them. He lifted it to his lips and kissed Will’s fingers several times, uncaring of the audience around them who must be ready to perish from envy.

“And I am quite taken with you,” Hannibal clarified.

The lights went all the way down and the show itself swept Hannibal’s attention away. Will glanced behind them again and saw Tobias watching him, then the violin teacher nodded. So, they were going to have it out right here at the Lyric Opera House?

Perfect, Will really needed to work out this agitation. He whispered to Hannibal he’d be right back and slipped away as if to get another drink or visit the men’s room.

In the lobby, Will shook Tobias’ hand again and asked, “You seemed to want to speak with me.”

“I’m just curious...if you know with whom you’ve become entangled,” Tobias said casually, and with a chilling smile. “I’ve learned a great deal about Dr. Lecter lately that makes me feel he and I have more in common. It is quite a challenge in these times, to find someone whose interests entirely align with one’s own.”

“I couldn’t agree more,” Will said serenely as blood pulsed behind his ears and his hands ached to enact violence. *Soon. Very soon. Wait for your moment…*

“I’m lucky to have found Hannibal,” Will added, “We’re soulmates. You couldn’t possibly understand. And now if you’ll excuse me…”

He wandered away and went into the men’s room, which was thankfully empty at the moment, although not for long. Tobias, with a deadly look flashing in his eyes, followed him, and unfortunately for Franklyn, he had chosen to follow his friend as well to see what was going on.

Will worked extremely well in small spaces. His rapid, brutal assault on Tobias overwhelmed the formidable adversary, who found himself quite literally speechless thanks to a harsh punch Will landed to his throat. He choked Tobias out using his arms so as to leave no prints, ecstatic on the high of the kill, overjoyed to have an outlet for this rage and frustrated love, his jealousy calmed by eliminating any rival, even ones whom Hannibal did not desire. They shouldn’t have wanted Hannibal, shouldn’t have been *looking* at him like that.

He would have loved to paint the walls with their insides, but his normally savage behavior was a bad fit for this public setting. Will would have to be satisfied with the clean kills.

His usual victims were those he found through FBI cases and the news, those despicable people whose vile actions deserved punishment although they evaded justice -- the abusers,

especially of children and animals, the racists and homophobes unleashing their cruel and damaging vitriol. Will wasn't in the habit of killing anyone merely for sharing and expressing an attraction for someone he was dating...until now.

Franklyn, honestly, was just in the wrong place at the wrong time, standing frozen in total shock at Will's actions right up until he joined his friend slumped lifeless on the floor.

Will smiled to himself in the mirror, washed his hands and dried them, exited the men's room and neatly placed the "Out of Order" sign on the door handle. It was a crowded performance and the opera house looked understaffed. There were three other men's rooms on the premises. It was unlikely anyone would check the bathroom until later on, when Will and Hannibal were long gone.

Now. Will felt *much* better, and he had a very handsome date to be getting back to.

Chapter End Notes

The song in the car is "Bleed to Love Her" by Fleetwood Mac.

I'm laughing at my past self thinking this date was going to fit into one chapter 😂 Next up, the tables are turning...time for Jealous!Hannibal...

Feels like I'm home again

Chapter Notes

> The song for this chapter is "This Side" by Nickel Creek. I was really struck by this lyric: "It's foreign on this side
> / But it feels like I'm home again / There's no place to hide / But I don't think I'm scared". 🖤
>
> I made a playlist for the fic which I'll keep updating as we go along: https://open.spotify.com/playlist/4WeoEljZNjydQouKxoEISf?si=7DG7wFqKRniZu_aexTJXZQ

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I hope the performance wasn’t terribly dull for you,” Hannibal noted when they got back to Will’s car and the younger man once again opened his door.

“Naw, not at all,” Will grinned, leaning his arms on the door opening as he looked down at Hannibal in the passenger seat.

He looked so suave in that moment, with devilish flirtation glimmering in slate grey eyes, framed by the dark night and that skinny-fit suit that clung to and accentuated his gorgeous figure. Hannibal caught his breath with some difficulty while Will licked his pretty lips; the word “studly” occurred to him, a new addition to the doctor’s immense and apparently still expanding vocabulary.

“What would make you think I didn’t enjoy myself?” Will asked, the coy way he raised his brows sending a shiver down Hannibal’s spine. He knew exactly what he was doing, and Hannibal loved it, intrigued by the sudden change in Will’s mood from irritated to smoothly upbeat. “After all, I was with you.”

“Really, Will, you will turn my head.” Hannibal smirked; Will shut the door and circled the car, then climbed into the driver’s seat and slid the keys into the ignition, his every move cocky and assured.

“Hope so.”

Hannibal rested a hand on Will’s elbow as the engine started up. “I noticed that you felt uncomfortable at several points. When I left you alone to go to the bar and became inundated by various acquaintances...I should not have left your side in an unfamiliar setting.”

“It’s fine,” Will said firmly, a flash of insecurity finally showing in his slightly tensed features. It passed a second later, but Hannibal saw he’d struck a nerve.

It stood to reason that his prideful boy was ambitious about proving he could move in Hannibal's world with ease, and Hannibal therefore regretted his own short-sightedness in abandoning Will to the wolves of the Baltimore upper crust. They could be insufferable snobs on their best days, horrid prigs on their worst, and while Hannibal appreciated their high brow conversation and posh lifestyles that complimented his own preferences, he also understood that such an outing might be exhausting to someone more accustomed to relaxed, casual environments.

Will worked so hard every day, catching killers that would twist and destroy the minds of weaker profilers, and he had plenty of other responsibilities and pursuits to tend to. Still, he took the time to consistently let Hannibal know of his regard and romantic interest, time to buy flowers and drive to Baltimore to convey his date to an event in which he had no interest.

Appreciation and disbelief in his own luck filled Hannibal's heart with unaccustomed sensations: gratitude, a desire to "make it up to Will" for the underwhelming start to the date, almost a twinge of...humility? How strange, yet sweet. Hannibal felt himself sinking like a stone under the storm waters of this fascinated adoration of Will Graham, and drowning had become a wonderfully appealing prospect somehow.

"I made reservations at Charleston," Hannibal explained, "But I think instead I would like you to select the location of our dinner this evening. I would be honored, in fact, if you would take me to your favorite place for food and drink."

"My favorite?" Will sat back and looked at him incredulously. "I don't think it would be exactly your style, Dr. Lecter."

"Exactly. It won't be my style; it will be yours. I want you to have exactly what you like best, where you are comfortable and at ease, and share a part of your world with me, as I have tried, with mixed success, to show you something that I enjoy."

"Hannibal." Will loosed a husky chuckle and pressed his forehead to Hannibal's, then clasped his face and kissed both his cheeks. "Please don't feel bad that I didn't have a perfect time at the opera. You didn't do anything wrong, and I *love* that you wanted to share part of yourself with me. Okay?"

Hannibal nuzzled his face into Will's and fondly kissed the tip of his nose, then ran a hand through slicked-back curls to ruffle them. "Okay."

"Great." Will turned the radio on and started driving, to whence his companion could not begin to theorize.

Hannibal enjoyed the immersion into Will's world already, from the contemplative rumblings of the mellow rock classics, to the way the car smelled of Will's newly upgraded aftershave. In fact, Hannibal had to wonder if Will was actively trying to drive him quite wild with salivating lust, between the suit and the sensuous, woodsy-citrus notes of Bleu de Chanel.

Two keychains hung from the rear view mirror in the front seat: a miniature faux-wood plaque which read "*I'd rather be fishing*" and a silver plate reading "*Best Dog Dad Ever*." Will sang along quietly to the radio and drummed his hands on the steering wheel.

"*Drink up baby, look at the stars / I'll kiss you again, between the bars*..." Will was only barely in tune, but there was something about how entirely relaxed and *himself* he was in Hannibal's presence that felt like a privilege. His voice, manly and sweet with the barest twang of a Southern inflection, draped over Hannibal like irresistible honey. He could have listened to Will sing all night; he remained casually quiet for some time just hoping Will would go on and on.

Will drove them back towards Wolf Trap and pulled into a Barbecue Roadhouse called Wes' which was located in the next town over from his own residence.

"Are you sure about this?" Will asked, pausing with his hands still on the wheel as Hannibal took in the sight of the gravel parking lot heavily occupied by motorcycles, the sound of country music emanating from inside, the bold red neon sign above the door with an image of a pig wearing a gingham bib, holding a knife and fork.

Well, Hannibal reasoned, novelty was always exciting, particularly where his darling Will was concerned. Moreover, the logo of this restaurant featured a blatant reference to cannibalism which amused him.

"Quite sure," Hannibal nodded. "Take me to your world, Will."

"Here," Will suggested, pausing outside the car, backing Hannibal against it as he undid his bow tie and slipped it from his collar. With a naughty, intent smile, Will undid the first two buttons of Hannibal's white shirt and helped him out of his suit jacket. He popped the trunk of his car and neatly stored Hannibal's tuxedo implements, along with his own tie and grey suit jacket.

Will found a denim jacket in the backseat and slung it on, only to pause and question, "Hey, are you cold? I just have the one jacket, and you can have it if you need it."

He looked incredibly sexy standing there in his element with his curls rifled and the casual coat thrown on over an untucked shirt; Hannibal wanted to eat him up in so many ways.

"I'm fine just as I am," he lied; it was actually rather a cold evening, but it was such a short walk to the restaurant, and he wanted to keep looking at Will in that particular outfit. The pop of the jacket collar, the quick swirl of Will's keys as he tossed and caught them, then put them in his pocket and pressed Hannibal against the car for a kiss.

"You're so much more than fine, Daddy," Will murmured, his kiss hot and deep, hands all over Hannibal, roving down his sides and swiftly untucking his shirt, clasping his hips before nipping his lower lip. "Mmm. You're the yummiest thing I've ever seen."

Hannibal turned red, beyond even being surprised by now that to be termed "yummy" drew this bashful response from his previously cold heart.

He couldn't summon words, so Will spoke again. "That said, I'm fucking *starving*. Let's go get something to eat."

The roadhouse perplexed Hannibal immediately upon their entrance. It was cavernous and crowded with happy patrons, all around the large bar and dotting the many tables with brown paper tablecloths, dancing to the twangy jukebox music, swigging beer from massive glasses and wolving down racks of meat dripping with sauce which was a suspicious hue of red almost as bright as the sign outside.

His shiny black shoes crunched against something on the floor, and he glanced down in more fish-out-of-water confusion. “Is this an elephant habitat?”

Will laughed at Hannibal’s reaction to the peanut shells all over the floor. “It’s just an old tradition. There’s free peanuts in the shell for anyone who wants them, and you can just toss the shells on the floor when you’re done.”

Hannibal might have questioned if this was a health code violation, but Will’s cheeks were pink from the cold outside and he looked so happy to be here with Hannibal, so the sophisticated doctor did his best to “just go with it.”

Once they were shown to their very own paper-topped table complete with an extra roll of paper towels and an assortment of hot sauces, the waitress turned up. She was a bit younger than Will, with red hair in a ponytail tucked into a “Wes’” baseball cap, pretty freckles and a peppy attitude.

“Hey, Will, who’s the new friend?” Her eyes twinkled as Will glowed with enthusiasm at being asked which, in turn, eased Hannibal’s kneejerk reaction of jealousy at the obvious way the young woman admired Will upon greeting him.

“This is Hannibal. Hannibal, this is Pam, an old friend. She always saves a little leftover meat for me to take home for the dogs, so you know she’s good people.”

“Aww, isn’t he too sweet?” Pam laughed, blushing to an extent which Hannibal found quite unnecessary.

“A pleasure to make your acquaintance, Pam,” Hannibal managed with a flickering smile.

“And what can I get for you two handsome gents this evening?” Pam’s pen hovered over her notepad as Hannibal considered forgiving her since otherwise it was going to be a long night at Wes’.

He had entreated Will to order on both of their behalves, so the younger man requested with confidence, “We’ll have the Finger Sucker platter please, with the baby ribs and catfish.”

“That comes with cornbread and baked potato,” Pam noted. “You want the potatoes loaded?”

“Why the hell not?” Will decided, squeezing Hannibal’s knee under the table. “Let’s live a little. We’ll also have two Shipyard Monkey IPA’s if you have ‘em.”

“You bet, honey, ice cold,” Pam answered cheerily. She wiggled her curvy behind upon departure as Hannibal again reminded himself this was no occasion for homicide.

“Have you and Pam ever dated?” Hannibal blurted the second they were alone again.

“No, she’s just a friend. We went on one date a couple of years ago, but I wasn’t really feeling that ‘something more’ chemistry, you know? Hannibal, I wouldn’t take you on purpose somewhere an ex worked.”

Will nudged his foot against Hannibal’s with a soft smile. “Promise. As a matter of fact, I should probably use this occasion to let you know...I’m absolutely the jealous type.”

“Oh?” Hannibal slid his hand over the brown paper on the table, then fiddled with the salt and pepper shakers as his face felt progressively warmer with every word Will spoke. He felt deeply reassured that they were both inclined to possessiveness, and pacified for the time being by Will’s explanation that he would never intentionally provoke him into a jealous state.

“Yeah.” Will bit his lip, looking self-conscious. “I mean, that’s not telling you the half of it. I know we aren’t officially a couple or anything, but, um...just be forewarned, in case we ever are. If you were mine, and I saw someone flirt with you, lay a hand on you, try to take you away from me, I’d lose my damn mind. I guess that’s a character flaw on my part, and I know it isn’t the most attractive quality in a man.”

“That’s where you’re wrong, my dear.” Hannibal had melted entirely by now, and took both of Will’s hands in his on the table. Stroking thoughtfully over Will’s knuckles and his lovely long fingers, he added, “The news of your jealous nature has me feeling singularly aroused and appreciative.”

Will let out a sigh of relief. “Wow, that went so much better than I expected. Thought I might make you wanna come up with some excuse to get away from the crazy jealous guy. Some people think I’m a little too intense.”

“Then they don’t deserve your company or attention,” Hannibal concluded as Pam returned with their drinks and cornbread; this time, he barely noticed the waitress.

The beer was more palatable than Hannibal had anticipated; his sensitive and honed taste buds intuited a lively hops balance that made a wonderful compliment to the refreshingly scrumptious fare. For the ribs, with their spicy-sweet marinade, were perfectly prepared, and the baked potato with its excessive but savory toppings of bacon, cheese, sour cream and scallions he might call a ‘guilty pleasure.’

Will kept gazing at him across the table as they ate, as though no one else was in the room, and Hannibal was delighted with the way the date had continued to develop.

That was, until a couple entered the establishment and immediately made a beeline for their table.

The man was handsome, with wavy, greying hair and the same jeans-and-flannel apparel that Will often wore. He had his arm around a younger woman with thick glasses, a sunflower patterned babydoll dress and doc martin boots. In short, the duo bore every appearance of the prototypical “hipster” couple frequenting the barbecue roadhouse because it seemed like a “cute” and “ironic” thing to do. Hannibal disliked them on sight, not least of all because the man’s face lit up at the sight of *his* Will.

“Man, I haven’t seen you in ages, Will,” the man said in a booming voice overflowing with charisma that turned Hannibal’s blood cold.

Will, for his part, looked mildly mortified; Hannibal read shock and dismay in his eyes that filled him with possessive protectiveness and many distressing questions. “Carter, good to see you.” His smile was stiff, and his foot nudged Hannibal’s again, as if to say *I didn’t plan on this*.

This “Carter” fellow had the audacity to pause several moments before pretending he had only just observed Hannibal sitting there with his sleeves rolled up and a side plate of rib bones beside his half-empty beer glass. Out of his element and infuriated by the stranger’s pushy interruption, Hannibal’s eyes darted to the sharp knife on the tablecloth. A shame about the public circumstances of the moment.

“Oh, I didn’t see you there. Carter Jackson, how’s it going, buddy?” The man had periwinkle eyes that sized Hannibal up and seemed to find him immediately unimposing. What poor judgment, but then if this fool had once had a chance with Will and was no longer with him, that came as no surprise.

I’m not your buddy, Hannibal’s seething glare announced while his armored smile was lethal.

“Hannibal Lecter; charmed, I am sure. And who is your lovely companion?” Hannibal asked pointedly, since the poor, really quite attractive and kind-faced young lady had been completely ignored by her date this entire time.

“Oh! This is Mindy. We met at the Meadowbrook,” Carter elaborated with a meaningful look in Will’s direction which had Hannibal contemplating potential future recipes for the despicable would-be rival. “They were showing *The Double Life of Veronique,* I thought of you, Will. I know how you love Kieslowski’s films.”

“Right.” Will looked annoyed, barely cloaking it with politeness. He shook Mindy’s hand and said, “So great to meet you. I love your boots.”

“Thanks!” Mindy grinned, looking as if Will’s kindness eased the disappointment she was starting to feel about Carter’s behavior. “Hey, babe, let’s go get a table. I wanna try the rattlesnake margarita.”

“It’s delicious, enjoy,” Will encouraged. He reached for Hannibal’s hand, even chased it as the doctor edged his fingers away. Scooping his date’s hand up in his own, he gave it a warm squeeze and cut off all attention from Carter.

Hannibal took the hint and relaxed into Will’s hold on him, then kissed his hand, the public display of affection causing Carter to frown slightly before he and Mindy mercifully departed for their own table.

“Don’t start, please, and know that I *get* it, completely.” Will moved his chair next to Hannibal’s and looked at him imploringly. “I am so sorry about that, and you have to know he’s the last person I expected to see here. I just want to have a perfect date with you, and it seems like the universe is sabotaging me at every turn!”

Hannibal frowned at his lover for a few moments of bewildered, anxious attempts to properly assess the situation and his own feelings. On the one hand, he was desperately jealous and angry between Pam's slightly flirtatious attitude towards Will, and then Carter's unforgivably rude presumption. It especially wounded him to notice that he and Carter were roughly the same "type," that Will apparently had a taste for older men with silvering hair, broad shoulders and sophisticated preferences in the arts. He wanted to tear Carter apart with his bare hands and teeth, and even that did not seem like a sufficient punishment for the crime of having had, in any capacity, his Will, not to mention openly showing his interest was still present whilst Will was on a date with *Hannibal*.

Hannibal, who was the only one Will professed to want. He let his burden of pained fury lighten a bit because Will's luminous eyes were so full of a repentance which wasn't truly earned.

"It isn't your fault, Will," he finally answered, unable to keep the throaty rasp of passionate jealousy and anger from his tone. "You couldn't possibly have known Carter would be here. Tell me, were you in a serious relationship?"

"No," Will recalled, "I wouldn't even call it a relationship, really. We dated on and off for a while a few months back, I didn't feel a connection and he did, then he didn't really want to let me go and it got uncomfortable. I should have done something more serious to put an end to his fixation with me."

"Something more serious?" Hannibal inquired, his rage diverted by the fascinating darkness in Will's face, his poisonous tone when he spoke the regret.

Somehow, Hannibal doubted that Will meant he should have notified the police of any harassment on Carter's part. "Something serious" sounded more like Hannibal's usual method of dealing with the rude, and he was dying to hear more about it.

"Oops," Will laughed awkwardly, "Got a little carried away there. I'm just really frustrated. I wanted to show you an amazing time tonight, and instead…"

"I am having one of the best nights of my life, Will Graham," Hannibal insisted, "No complication, no inconvenient past acquaintances or mistakes, no regrets and no difference in our preferences for places to go and things to do could possibly prevent me from having an extraordinarily splendid time. I merely need your hand in mine, the gift of your continued regard, the chance to explore what we are finding between us. And…"

He cupped Will's face, running his fingers adoringly over his stubble, tracing his jaw, then trailing his fingers down Will's neck, worshipful even in these small, publicly decent gestures that did not come close to portraying his desperate ardor.

"And I come alive. As I have never come alive before. It's all because of you, Will."

"I don't believe it," Will said, a lump in his throat and tears dotting his eyes. "I'm sorry, I don't meant to get all dramatic on you. It's just that I've been so worried about driving you away from me that it never occurred to me, you could feel the same way I do. That I could be

that lucky. I never knew how much I wanted to have something like this in my life, that I could need it so badly."

"The feeling is mutual. I cannot recall a single moment of my life since childhood," Hannibal said thoughtfully, drawing a distinction of before and after losing Mischa. "A single time since then that I have felt I *needed* anything or anyone. Let me show you I'm sincere, since you are so determined to worry."

With a fond grin, he stood and offered his hand to Will. "Dance with me."

"*Dance*?" Will shook his head, "You don't wanna dance to this music, do you?"

Hannibal paused to absorb the jaunty country rhythm and the husky female singer belting out, "*If your heart ain't busy tonight, I could keep it occupied for a long, long time.*"

"Indeed I do," he said with an arch look that made Will blush. "As it happens, I am an exceptional dancer, and highly adaptable to many genres."

***

"Wow, you weren't kidding," Will marveled as Hannibal led him onto the dancefloor and immediately began moving effortlessly, swaying on beat with sensuous expertise, as if he danced to Tanya Tucker songs all the time. "You really can dance to anything."

Hannibal smirked and spun Will around, then caught him and dipped him backwards as the song ended, holding Will protectively in his strong arms. They let out breathy laughs of pure enjoyment as their eyes stayed locked, then a sentimental, romantic slow song started to play.

Will thought he would dissolve into a lustful, enraptured puddle as Hannibal drew him into a slow dance posture, not a polite waltz, but a handsy, snugly pressed school dance-style position. He snuggled his face into Hannibal's neck as the older man held him tight, Will's arms around his neck, Hannibal's clasped low on Will's back.

"There, now," Hannibal murmured against Will's ear before kissing it, his hands hot and heavy through the fabric of Will's shirt, their groins pressed nearly flush as arousal coursed through Will at the brush of firmness he felt when Hannibal's cock subtly rubbed against him. "Enjoy yourself, baby."

He gasped and kissed Hannibal's neck, his half-lidded eyes happening to dizzily glance over his lover's shoulder to see Carter staring at them from his table with Mindy, disapproving and resentful. Will didn't care about that, or his wish that he had killed Carter back when the man originally acted like an ass towards him; of course he hadn't because anyone would be able to find out they dated, and he didn't want any evidence of his involvement. He had been so upset with himself anyway, for letting Carter live so that he could tarnish this date and hurt Hannibal's feelings even for one split second, but the angry self-blame faded, swallowed up by the perfect romance of loving Hannibal so fucking much right now, needing and adoring and being held like Hannibal could never want to be anywhere else, would never let him go.

Will stopped worrying about the opera and the other people who wanted Hannibal, and whether he could measure up. He slid his hand into Hannibal's hair and savored their closeness, the slow rock of their hips to the gentle but sultry tune and wistful vocals. The steel guitar and fiddles represented the music of his childhood, where he felt comforted and at home, and now the sounds were fusing with Hannibal's embrace and the older man's murmuring voice, sighing affirmations that soothed his soul.

"*Find a truck and fire it up, Lean on the gas and off the clutch / Leave Dallas in the dust, I need you in a rush / So, baby, run,...*"

George Strait was singing on the jukebox and Hannibal was swaying with him, saying under his breath and only for Will, "I'm here. Just be here with me, baby. Let Daddy take care of absolutely everything. I'll give you whatever you need."

Will moaned, caught up in the moment, as if the music and Hannibal's arms showed how he could remember where he always felt safe and warm, when he was a kid listening to country songs in his parents' kitchen in Louisiana while his mom boiled blue crabs and let him sneak bites of the peach praline cake she had made for dessert and his dad gardened outside, talking to them through the open window. Home and safe, just like this, the sensation deepened now by nostalgia and comfort fusing with heady lustful need. Will was where he belonged.

"I love you," he sighed, his fingers clutching into Hannibal's shirt, wrinkling the perfectly smooth fabric, and he was so drunk on the older man's delectable body heat and spicy cologne, the thrall of Hannibal's attention and precious words that it took several thudding, world-shaking heartbeats before he realized what he had just said.

They had barely noticed the song changing; this time it was Pam Tillis singing "*I can feel that something pounding in my brain / Just anytime that someone speaks your name / Trumpets sound and I hear thunder boom / Everytime that you walk in the room…*"

It was a midtempo song, but they had stayed in near-scandalous slow dance position, Will drawing back now with his heart leaping into his throat, so afraid Hannibal would be dismayed by the too-soon profession of helpless love. He just hadn't been able to hold it back for another moment.

If Hannibal didn't want it, if he was scaring his lover off again, Will would try and take it back or laugh it off, or anything that would keep him here, with his wonderful strong arms wrapped tight around him. Anything.

Instead of the severe or disappointed expression Will feared, he found Hannibal beaming at him, his golden eyes glazed with tears. It was okay! He could say it, Hannibal wanted this.

Will laughed rapturously and kissed Hannibal's mouth, once, twice, three times, accentuating each warm press of eager lips with more exultations of words he had repressed for weeks. "I love you," he sighed, "Hannibal, I love you!"

Chapter End Notes

In the car, Will was singing "Between the Bars" by Elliott Smith

There's so much more to come, and yes that will include deadly consequences of Jealous!Hannibal 🔥😈The murder courtship is about to heat up!

Plus, Hannibal is going to meet Will's parents!

Hope you're continuing to enjoy, and thanks for reading ❤️

Good to love

Chapter Notes

> The song for this chapter is "Good to Love" by FKA Twigs, her music is so so beautiful! Playlist updated ✨✨ https://open.spotify.com/playlist/4WeoEljZNjydQouKxoEISf?si=kIq49IhxTYSpE2LdvjFopg
>
> This chapter is entirely fluff and smut, but I promise there's more murdery plot developments in the next installment. 🖤
>
> cw: dildo play, a bit of foot fetish

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will noticed that Hannibal showed a tiny flinch at the cold when they came back outside. His adorable micro-expressions were swoon-worthy. Will loved that he was getting to know how those brief nose crinkles and hand flexes portrayed disapproval, a mild chill, or his personal favorite, the small *snarl* that happened when Hannibal's lust and temper collided. Memories of the last time they had sex came floating very pleasantly into his mind, and he smiled to himself, letting the smugness settle in, knowing they would do it again soon and he didn't have to live in doubt of that anymore.

He shrugged off his jacket and put it around Hannibal's shoulders. Hannibal intuited, without mentioning it, that Will had wanted to do that all night. It was just another small act of claiming; Will knew Hannibal knew. They felt so in sync, he wouldn't be surprised if they finished each other's sentences soon enough.

Hannibal let Will cling to his arm and nuzzle into his shoulder during the short walk; the younger man clearly couldn't keep his hands to himself, and it was a sheer delight to his lover. He put his arm around Will and rubbed his firm bicep, then kissed the top of his head, inhaling the agent's peppermint shampoo, high on life in a way he'd never experienced outside of the kill.

"I'll drive this time," Hannibal proposed, desiring to take care of his boy as he had promised.

He had not said the "three words" back, but he knew the moment for this all-important reciprocation would arrive organically, most likely when he least expected it. He wished for the words to fly his lips instinctively and because there was no other expression that could possibly do. He wanted all sorts of things that once seemed foolish...but underneath his former superior snobbery towards the idea of romance lay the truth of his fears.

After Mischa, he had vowed never to allow his contentment in life to be under someone else's power, but here he was, wrapped around Will's little finger. There was nowhere else he

would rather be, even if he *was* still more than a bit scared at his own vulnerability. He considered that the fear might never fully dissipate, and he must acclimate, a fuller surrender, presenting himself as the banquet for Will's senses and decisions. He needed the fire of that self-sacrifice simply to know he was awake these days, moving further and further away from the numb, ego-driven complacency of his former existence.

Hannibal Lecter had become *reckless*.

"Take me home, Daddy?" Will murmured with a warm, moist kiss to Hannibal's cheek.

It was a mirroring act of claiming, Hannibal driving Will's car. He adjusted the seat to suit his taller height and turned Will's favorite music back on. Halfway to Will's house, the younger man surprised him by suddenly jolting upright in his seat. Until that point, Will had slumped in a lustful, happy daze, watching Hannibal drive as anticipation for inevitable physical intimacy built between them, deliciously palpable. Normally Hannibal might find such slovenly posture unseemly, but in Will it was, of course, sweet and entirely forgivable.

"Oh, I completely forgot! My parents are at my house." Will slapped his forehead. "I'm sorry, I assumed that if things went well, we'd head back to your place because I thought we were gonna be in Baltimore. So my parents were going to stay over to take care of the dogs."

Hannibal smiled, easing the car down the bumpy country road that led to Will's house. "If you do not think it is too soon, I would be delighted to meet your parents. They must be extraordinary people to have created and raised the remarkable son I see before my eager eyes."

"Aw, come on," Will blushed, "If you really want to meet my parents, you'd better lighten up on the praise, or you'll have to peel me off of you."

"I know what you like, and the more I can discover about how to please you, I will continue to give it to you in excess." Hannibal parked next to Will's parents' pick-up truck and leaned in for a quick kiss, tucking a curl back behind his boy's pretty ear.

"Likewise." Will grinned. "Okay. Meet the parents time." Jokingly, he rolled his shoulders back and stretched as if heading into battle. "Let's do this."

Hannibal tucked his shirt back in and swiped a hand over his hair which had been disheveled between dancing and kissing.

"Hiiii," Will called out as he eased the door open, "I have company with me, so you two better not be making out on the couch!"

The dogs rushed up to greet their master as Hannibal stepped in behind his lover and Will crouched down to pet each furry head. The pets' anxious impatience for Will's affection rendered Hannibal a momentary pause of discomfort; he was not so different himself. He was certainly going to have to learn how to increase his humility along with his deepening love, an unexpected challenge.

"Okay, okay," Will laughed, "Go back to bed everybody, it's late."

Obediently, the dogs trotted to the assortment of pillows which rested in a half-circle before the warmly crackling fireplace. Placed to the left of the room were several bookcases which Hannibal still wished to examine, in his next opportunity, to glean whatever insights he could into Will's character. His love was not the man to purchase and display a book without intention; every item in this house had a meaning and expressed his personality.

Fitted snugly but cozily into this front room between bookcases and "dog zone," a well-worn sage green couch and matching easy chair were arranged in front of a a medium sized television, not the flat screen which almost everyone had these days, but an "old school" version sitting on a wooden stand. Beneath the t.v. in the shelves of the stand was a collection of dvds whose cracked plastic covers showed they were well used. Hannibal would need to investigate those as well. He wanted to know everything about Will; he was nothing if not a sponge looking to soak up every drop of precious knowledge, and--

"You're home," said an attractive brunette woman in her late fifties, rising from the couch where a man of the same age was still sitting, giving an exaggerated yawn and stretch.

"We fell asleep, your dogs wore us right out. What gives, how come you're back?" The man asked groggily, not having noted Will's warning about company, and without having yet noticed Hannibal's presence. "Thought you wanted us to take care of the doggos in the mornin' too, cause you were gonna be canoodling with Dr. Wonderful--"

"*Honey,*" Will's mother hissed, leaning down to tap her husband's knee. She whisper-scolded, "*Dr. Wonderful is standing right there.*"

"*You guys*." Will sighed and dropped his head into his hand, adorably embarrassed by his parents' antics. Waving his free hand, he added, "Maddie and Travis Graham, this is Dr. Hannibal Lecter."

Hannibal absorbed the scene with deep interest. First, there was the support and love which he read easily from Will's parents' choice to accommodate his love life by dog-sitting. They were so comfortable here, it was obvious the family were close and spent plentiful time in each others' houses. On the coffee table in front of the couch, a large bowl was half-filled with popcorn and two cans of soda sat beside it. An old rerun of *Law and Order* played quietly from the t.v.

He could not imagine what it would be like to have parents such as these in one's life as an adult, the steadying influence, the unquestioned affection. The cozy scene made him immediately inclined to allow his positive predisposition towards Mr. and Mrs. Graham to grow into admiration and appreciation. Will only deserved the best, after all.

Then he observed with his usual acute attention to detail the physical resemblances, how the softly twining brunette curls had come from Will's mother, while the auburn highlighting must have been from his father. Will had his father's eyes and nose, but his mother's plush lips and elven ears, and his parents showed a happy, healthy, mellow demeanor which was pleasing. Mr. Graham's red and black plaid flannel shirt and faded blue jeans formed a clear "fashion" template for Will's usual preferences in attire which was quite endearing, while Mrs. Graham wore cream colored wide-leg trousers and a matching linen cardigan.

Hannibal remembered Will saying that his father fixed boats for a living and his mother was a relationship counselor. White and blue collar soulmates. How intriguing, to see the "opposites attract" energy between his lover's parents, which seemed almost a precursor to the differences in himself and Will. From the opera to the rib house, indeed. He liked the soothing sound of their thick Southern accents and their warm, sincere handshakes, the way Mrs. Graham looked nervous but excited to meet him, while her husband seemed to be "sizing" him up.

"So, you're interested in my son, huh?" Mr. Graham cupped his chin the way Hannibal had seen Will do at least a dozen times.

"I admire Will deeply, and appreciate any time I am privileged to spend with him," Hannibal answered smoothly and honestly.

His own sophisticated accent and manners seemed to have Maddie Graham charmed right away.

"Hush up, Travis, don't scare the nice doctor boyfriend away," She chided, elbowing her spouse. "Sorry, are we saying 'boyfriends'?"

As Will mumbled "*oh my God, please stop*" into his hand, Mrs. Graham continued earnestly, "Or is it 'partners'? 'Lovers'?"

"*Mom,*" Will said, turning scarlet.

"All of the above, in fact," Hannibal confirmed. He felt Will staring at him in surprise at the "serious relationship" talk he had just approved, to his parents no less. It filled him with pride and joy to give Will what he wanted while showing off their connection. "I must thank you for raising such an extraordinary son."

"You're welcome," Travis said, amused and beginning to approve. "And as for seeming suspicious of you, I'm just checking in on your intentions. A natural instinct for any father."

"If I had a child, I would certainly do no less. Feel free to ask me any questions that may aid in your evaluation of my validity as a potential mate for Will." With equal humor twinkling in his cinnamon eyes, Hannibal took up the easy chair while Will's parents sat on the couch.

Groaning in continued embarrassment, Will sat on the arm of Hannibal's chair. The older man immediately wrapped an arm around Will's waist that made him let out a sigh of relief. Hannibal could imagine sitting like this with Will's family, clearly marked as a couple, at holiday gatherings for years to come. He was unused to giving so much thought to the future, much less hope, even wistfulness.

"Well, I take it you treat him well," Travis proceeded.

"Dad, I'm going to strangle you," Will warned.

"No need." Hannibal chuckled. "It is my highest honor to treat your son like the prince he is."

“Good answer.” Travis’ eyes narrowed. “Maybe too good. We hear you’re a fantastic psychiatrist, so you spend most of your time helpin’ people. You must have some flaws, are you even human?”

“About an hour ago, I perplexed your son by eating a rack of barbecue ribs using a knife and fork,” Hannibal recalled. “As such, I certainly have much to learn in quite a few categories, casual food etiquette included.”

“How do you even eat ribs with silverware?” Maddie asked, bewildered.

“It took him ages.” Will grinned and looked at Hannibal as though he hung the moon. They both seemed to be glowing in this moment.

“And what do you like to do for fun?” Travis asked, his pretense of interrogation slipping into comfortable conversation.

“Do you do the karokey?” Maddie added excitedly. “We go every Wednesday night at Becky’s Tavern.”

“Mom, please,” Will put in, “I’ve told you, it’s karaoke, not ‘the karokey.’ And I’m sure Hannibal wouldn’t want to--”

“Actually, it sounds quite delightful.” Hannibal put aside his rational disdain for listening to terrible vocal performances and microphone feedback. If this was a Graham family tradition, he was “all in.”

“We always perform our wedding song.” Travis smiled nostalgically and spread his hands in the air. “‘After All,’ by Peter Cetera and Cher.”

“A classic,” Hannibal nodded. In truth, he had almost no knowledge of popular American music, yet there was some odd need he felt to fit in here. Perhaps he was overcompensating. There was nothing wrong with being a connoisseur of classical and opera.

“Hannibal is a bit of a musical genius himself,” Will bragged, bringing a flush to the older man’s cheeks. “He composes on harpsichord and theremin.”

Hannibal looked up at Will’s joyful face as the boy indulged in yet another round of talking him up. It was difficult not to simply cover Will in kisses, every moment of the night. The delicate fair skin, those soft pink cheeks and luscious lips, his eyes by lamp and dwindling firelight now shading glossy cerulean....too beautiful, too irresistible. He settled for gently squeezing Will’s hip and caressing his side, and could tell from Will’s soft sigh that his every touch ignited excitement while providing comfort.

“Harpsichord and theremin, how intriguing,” Maddie enthused. “Are those instruments popular in your part of the world?”

They began talking about Lithuania for some time, with Hannibal keeping his references carefully to the arts, traditional foods and the beautiful sights which any tourist should include on an itinerary of his homeland.

“And do your parents still live in Lithuania?” Maddie asked innocently.

Will tugged Hannibal’s sleeve subtly and gave him an apologetic look. Hannibal had confided to Will about his parents’ and sister’s deaths, although he had omitted a few more brutal details. But the young man clearly had not yet had a chance to tell his parents about it and avoid the awkward introduction of such a sad topic into a light ‘getting to know you’ chat.

Hannibal did not blame any of the Grahams for the situation, but he also did not wish to discuss his family’s fate at this time, after such a special date and when he and Will were floating in the ‘honeymoon phase’ of their relationship. Thinking about his parents and Mischa would drag his mood down to melancholy, and quickly.

Yet there did not seem to be a polite way to avoid answering directly, and Hannibal despised discourtesy enough to follow etiquette even when it wounded him.

“Actually,” he began, resigned, but Will interrupted him, squeezing his hand as if to say, *‘I’ve got this.’*

“Mom, would you play something for us on piano?” Will suggested. He met his parents’ puzzled expressions at the abrupt topic change with a pointed look that said to go along with it. “Mom taught me to play.”

“True enough, but *I* taught you to dance,” Travis smirked. “This boy can two-step along with the best of ‘em, Hannibal.”

“So I’ve observed,” Hannibal beamed.

Will hugged him and kissed his forehead while his parents were occupied at the plain but clean, well-kept piano which sat behind the t.v. in front of the window. Now, Will could tell his parents about Hannibal’s childhood tragedy privately, rather than Hannibal having to dredge up his trauma. He had protected Hannibal, shielded him the very moment he sensed his lover was uncomfortable. And Hannibal would have been just fine if he had to talk about his family, but he was so grateful to have avoided it, especially because of what it showed him about the way Will loved. As he had never been loved: adored, possessed and *guarded.*

Will would never let anyone hurt him, and Will would *never* hurt him intentionally. He would move mountains to make Hannibal happy.

Maddie and Travis were prattling on about song choices as she sifted through the sheet music atop the piano. Her husband hovered behind her, insisting that there had to be something better in the *Kings and Queens of Country* book than “Your Cheatin’ Heart” or “Folsom Prison Blues.”

“Overplayed,” he insisted, clucking his tongue at the selection of maudlin ditties about infidelity and loneliness. “And completely wrong for the mood.”

“Yeah, honey, I realize that, but the only other book he has is rock, and I am just not a rock ‘n roll kinda girl.”

Behind them, Hannibal rose from the chair and took Will by the arm, giving him a searching look. Will smiled softly. “What is it?”

Hannibal swallowed hard past the lump in his throat and blinked away a few tears, happy for what he had found and sad for what he had lost. The present joy was almost too vivid compared with the gruesome misery of his childhood losses, then the solitude which while “safe,” had rendered his life unaccountably dull. He had assumed the only way to be shielded from heartbreak was to be alone, but Will had shown him another way to accept belonging.

“I love you, Will,” he murmured, his husky voice breaking on his lover’s name. “Very, very much.”

Will was so astonished, he froze in place for a few beats as his parents finally found a suitable song.

“Well, there aren’t any cheerful songs in here, but this one’s the prettiest,” Maddie determined, and then her able fingers traveled lightly over the keys, every note sparkling, smooth, connected.

“May I have this dance?” Hannibal asked with a courtly, almost bashful smile.

He took Will’s hand and gathered him into a chaste waltzing position appropriate for his parent’s presence. Will was still staring at him as if he had seen the most beautiful, unexpected ghost, as if he had never really expected Hannibal to say he was in love. It made Hannibal want to spend the rest of his life proving to Will just exactly how in love he was. Now seemed like a good time to start.

“What is this song called?” he asked as Will held his shoulder just shy of tightly, his palm sweaty and clutching Hannibal’s own.

“‘Don’t it Make My Brown Eyes Blue,’” Will replied, swaying gently to the slow song, following Hannibal’s lead again. “Never expected to meet someone I could dance all night with.” His smile was tremulous, wavering, half-disbelieving.

“Nor did I, but you have surprised and amazed me at every turn. I used to avoid what was unpredictable at all costs, little imagining that this very quality would define the man I have come to need so much. You follow your own incomparably unique, ineffably brilliant nature, and it is quite beyond me.”

Will looked up at him, his smile quivering again. He leaned in to say in Hannibal’s ear, “When my parents leave, I’m gonna fuck you so good.”

His voice had gone raspy with emotion and desire; he had noticed that Hannibal loved his dirty talk more than almost anything, yet another startling quality in their connection. He know how this promise would exhilarate Hannibal and show how deeply his words had touched him. For them, the raunchy profession was very much another *“I love you.”* They were growing their own secret language, the lexicon expanding along with every room in Hannibal’s memory palace where Will was taking over.

His eyes were large and dark on Hannibal when he drew back, his velvety voice still wrapping around Hannibal with the naughty words that echoed in his mind. Hot, sweet desire coiled tightly in Hannibal's low belly, aching in his cock enough that he could only hope his lover's parents would not notice the extent of his arousal.

Luckily, Will's parents made no such observation, and after accepting a round of enthusiastic applause for her performance, Maddie bowed to them and said that she and Travis had really best be getting home.

"So absolutely lovely to meet you, Hannibal," Maddie said kindly.

No longer able to use Will as a shield for his state of excitement, Hannibal had picked up a book about fishing, quite randomly, from the side table by the chair and held it casually at a good angle to conceal what he must.

Will noticed his struggle, and gave him a softly deliberate smirk that sent shivers down Hannibal's spine and made his distraction even worse.

"And you as well, Mrs. Graham," Hannibal smiled awkwardly, shaking her hand from a respectable distance before doing the same with her husband. "And you, sir."

"I think he's a keeper, Will," Travis said, throwing his coat on without paying any heed to the barely shrouded seduction between his son and the good doctor.

"You know what, Dad?" Will asked with his eyes twinkling, "I think you're right."

***

"*Oh,*" Will marveled after closing the door on his parents. He came back over to Hannibal and stared at the bulge of hard cock tenting the older man's trousers. "I think you're gonna need a bigger book to hide that."

Hannibal smirked and tossed the book playfully aside, right before Will swept him into a commanding, heated embrace and laid a molton kiss on his lips. They were already tugging impatiently at each other's clothes as Will backed him towards the stairs, and then they laughed into a few more messy kisses as their shirts hit the stairs.

They kissed their way into Will's bedroom and collapsed onto the bed. Hannibal was getting used to being here, between light grey walls, atop the soft mattress with its indigo quilt in a geometric design, the sailboat painting above the bed, the neat arrangement of Will's fly fishing implements on the desk under the slanted window. The moonlight slipping into the room to caress Will's earnest features, his eyes almost black looming above Hannibal. He was losing track of what held him here, was it Will's eyes or the strong, firm press of beautiful hands pinning his wrists to the bed? All Hannibal knew was that he felt almost more at home here, in Will's space, under his control, than in his house or his fading, flickering person suit.

"Someday," Will murmured headily, digging his fingertips into the vulnerable skin of Hannibal's wrists, grinding with care so that their clothed cocks brushed with tantalizing

awareness of mutual readiness, yet no discomfort arose from the friction. They both moaned into a wet, frantic kiss, then Will dipped his face to kiss and bite at Hannibal's neck. The doctor tipped his head up, exposing his neck for Will's lavishing tongue and bruising sucks, already lost and panting out his lover's name, his sensitive skin damp and aching from the treasured bites, his cock thickening even more as heat coursed through him from head to toe.

Will hovered above him and smiled darkly, both of them feeling with elation the press of their naked chests, Hannibal's scratchy-soft hair rubbing Will's smoother pectorals, their nipples touching, bringing more shivering nuances of pleasure.

"Someday, I'm going to tie you up and edge you for hours, Daddy," Will promised, his own breath catching at the ragged moan Hannibal let out. "Oh, you'd like that, too? I'd get you so close over and over, until you cry and *beg* to come, but I'll keep saying, *no,* and you'd just have to take it. You wouldn't be able to escape my bindings. I'm a sailor and I know...how to tie knots."

"Please, Will." Hannibal's fingers flexed; he'd been obedient so far in Will's grip, but these words were pushing him towards a loss of control.

"Already begging, so impatient. You need your boy too much to wait, huh, Daddy?" Will shook his head and his brow creased when Hannibal shuddered with overwhelming desire. "Shh, it's okay. You know I'll always take care of you, honey. Someday, I *will* I make you wait for hours, dripping in sweat and precum, bound and helpless, finally coming so hard it hurts but it's so fucking worth the wait because you *never* knew you could come that hard. I want that for you."

"Will, you're killing me," Hannibal sighed, lifting his head, straining for at least a kiss, his cock rigid and twitching in his pants. The gentle friction Will provided was making him dizzy, just enough to tantalize, not enough to provide relief.

Will smirked. "Not tonight. Tonight, I'm so gone on you, I need to have you right now. I've been dreaming about nothing but fucking you all day and night, you and your gorgeous face, your sexy accent, your perfect intoxicating body, the smell of you, the taste."

He released Hannibal's wrists and raked his hands down the older man's body, savoring him, then undoing his trousers and kissing his cock through silk boxers. "My sophisticated, fancy daddy, look at this pretty underwear. Your big cock, all dressed up for me." He licked and sucked Hannibal through the silk, breathing in the scent of his musky arousal.

"I wonder if I could get you to come just from talking," Will mused, mercifully releasing Hannibal's aching cock and stroking him slowly, easy lubrication from precum making it so good that Hannibal tugged Will's curls and gasped. "You know that I probably could, but it's not what you want, huh?"

"No," Hannibal sighed, licking his lips, his hips bucking instinctively into the rhythm Will set with his stroking hand, "I want your mouth...and your cock."

"That's a good Daddy. I want to give you everything you need." Will stood only to strip his pants off and grab the lube from his bedside table drawer, but Hannibal's hungry eyes

followed his every move and glanced something else of interest in the drawer.

“What’s this?” Hannibal inquired almost politely, naked and hard on the bed, lying on his side and reaching over to the drawer to pull out a sizable anal dildo.

He raised his light brows, and it was his turn to smirk, turning the softly bendable sex toy in his hands, admiring the eight inches of purple but otherwise quite realistic cock, complete with vein texture and a lifelike ridge at the tip.

“Well. *That*,” Will revealed, not embarrassed, but rather pleased at Hannibal’s curiosity and intrigue.

He straddled Hannibal’s hips, drizzled lube onto both their cocks and took pressed them together, both of them immediately groaning in pleasure.

“I named that *Hannibal.* You know, when we weren’t together-together...I missed you a lot at night. And during the day. I took it to work a few times--”

“*Will,*” Hannibal moaned, drifting away in a sea of bliss with every knowing stroke of Will’s hand on them, pressing their hot, hard skin together, getting them close in seconds. “Will, not yet…”

“Mmm, you’re right.” Will sighed, “It’s just so hard to resist all the different ways to get us there. Like, how about…” Playfully, he passed the lube to Hannibal and prepared to sit on his face while reaching again for his lover’s cock.

Eagerly, Hannibal parted Will’s cheeks and licked his hole, reaching down to grasp and stroke the younger man’s rock hard dick at the same time.

“Oh, God,” Will gasped, taking as much of Hannibal as he could fit in his mouth.

It was a struggle but he was infinitely motivated, eventually pressing his lips tight to the base as light pubic hairs brushed his nose and Hannibal’s breath stuttered against his hole. Will let out happy choking noises and gripped Hannibal’s thighs tightly, possessively, silently saying, *mine*.

“Naughty boy,” Hannibal accused hoarsely as Will pulled his mouth off and shot him a wet smirk.

“For you? Always.” He raised his eyebrows and curved his moist lips in a devilish smile.

In delighted vengeance, Hannibal lubricated the dildo and positioned it teasingly at Will’s entrance.

“Oh, fuck, I love how your mind works,” Will approved, mouthing lazily at Hannibal’s cock as his lover began to press the dildo inside his tight walls, the rim sucking the toy in slowly.

That familiar tingle ignited in Will’s stomach, butterflies of pleasure at the penetration, much more arousing because Hannibal was controlling the long, firm strokes, until finally the toy

was seated as deeply as it could fit. The purple PVC base protruded from Will's hole as the older man admired his erotic mischief, Will's shapely ass having never looked better to him.

"*Fuck*, fuck-fuck-fuck," Will gritted out weakly, so full that it almost hurt in the best way. "You know, just for that…"

He changed position, above Hannibal again and face to face, pressing full-body against the doctor, kissing his lips with fervent passion, while Hannibal gripped the base of the toy and slid it in and out a few more times.

"Oh my *god,* I'm going to get you for this," Will insisted, red-faced and breathless, "I'm going to get you better than I ever have, Daddy."

He sat back and widely parted Hannibal's thighs, then used the rest of the lube left in the bottle to slick his hole. Still shivering with the dildo resting deep inside him, Will stroked himself and lined up to Hannibal's entrance, his eyes burning down into his lover's needy amber gaze.

"You haven't had this in a while, Daddy. You miss it?" Will smiled in purest, dirtiest joy as he began to press inside Hannibal, his hands planted roughly under the older man's knees.

"Yes, baby," Hannibal moaned, "Please."

His feet landed desperately against Will's shoulders, and as he began to thrust in, Will licked and nibbled his toes, the soft bottoms of his feet. The younger man slid in to the hilt and cried out at the dual pleasure of fucking Hannibal with his own ass filled.

"Daddy," Will moaned, sweat beading his brow.

"Come here, my darling." Hannibal drew Will flush against him, where Will immediately kissed and bit at his shoulder.

Hannibal began gliding the dildo in and out again, following the timing of Will's thrusts inside him, both of them loudly exclaiming various obscenities, Hannibal's in three languages. Will nuzzled into Hannibal's neck and wept with bliss, his tears of exertion and sensation hot and soft in comparison to the welcome, ragged scrape of his beard.

"Hnnnhhh, God, Hannibal, I'm gonna...I can't last like this," Will groaned, ecstasy building so fast and hard inside him, he couldn't possibly keep up.

"I know, sweet boy," Hannibal sighed, loving Will's hands wrapped tight around the back of his neck, pulling at his hair. "I want this for you, for both of us. Give it to me now."

He cupped Will's ass cheek and squeezed, lightly spanking as he continued his ministrations with the dildo, then Will burst inside him with a helpless mewl, hips shuddering against Hannibal's. His copious release was warm and wet inside Hannibal, who brought him back down sweetly, easing the dildo from the clenching hold of his hole, kissing flushed cheeks and drawing a love-addled boy to his chest for snuggles.

Chapter End Notes

I included a brief allusion to a lyric from Ruelle's song "Until We Go Down," "I need that fire just to know that I'm awake." 🖤

You're a cowboy like me

Chapter Notes

"You had some tricks up your sleeve / Takes one to know one" - Taylor Swift ✨✨✨

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will woke with a smile to the sound of his piano in the living room, knowing Hannibal must have roused in the dead of night and wandered out there to play.

Naked and happy, he rose from bed with a long stretch and a yawn, scratching his underarm before heading into the living room with just a sheet wrapped around him, his curls rumpled, body still aching with resonating pleasure from earlier.

Hannibal sat shirtless in a pair of Will's blue plaid pajama pants, playing the loveliest song. The melody was haunting; it seemed to drift through so many shades of joy and pain, it struck Will to his soul. He leaned over Hannibal and draped his arms loosely about the older man's neck, then kissed his cheek.

The doctor smiled fondly and went on playing, so Will sat next to him on the piano bench, watching his fingers and his strong forearms, the play of dim lamplight over his chiseled features, the honeyed glow of his mysterious eyes.

When the song was over, Will gently bumped his shoulder and murmured, "That was stunning. What is that piece?"

"I haven't given it a name yet." Hannibal wasn't meeting his gaze, which always meant he felt self-conscious. "Aside, of course, from 'Will.'"

"You *wrote* that?" Will asked in astonishment. "When?"

"I've been toying with the melody in the back of my mind since we met." Hannibal turned to Will at last, gazing at him in wonderment, soft and sure.

"I'm, uh...Hannibal, God." Will clasped his jaw, stroked a lock of silver-strewn blonde back from his brow. "I'm so in love with you, it's honestly scary."

"Then we will be afraid together." Hannibal smiled again, reassuring this time, and surprised Will by hoisting him up by the waist, then sitting him atop the piano.

Will giggled quietly, his feet landing with a sharp clang on the keys, the dogs across the room raising groggy heads to check all was well before going back to sleep. The curtains were open, snow falling outside in a silent cascade of fluffy, crystalline flakes, twirling in the wind.

Hannibal gently tugged the sheet from Will's body and admired him for a few moments of intensity that made the younger man's heart hammer incessantly. The doctor cupped Will's face and leaned up to softly kiss his lips, electric tension immediately radiating between them. He grasped Will's knees and parted his thighs, stood between them, then leaned the boy back so that he had full access to the body he longed to worship.

His big, powerful hand rested on Will's collarbone, dragged down his chest and stomach before grabbing his hips. Will slipped down, ass bumping the piano keys, another chiming random note sounding as Hannibal kept him firmly in place before sucking his half-hard cock to full attention, Will's arms spread like listless angel wings atop the piano, his ceaseless building moans Hannibal's favorite song of all.

He ate Will out with long, lingering attention, intent on having him sopping wet and relaxed, until he could sink a finger slowly inside his velvety tightness, then two...Will came helplessly when Hannibal crooked both fingers up to brush his prostate, and Hannibal lapped up every drop, then let his pants fall down around his ankles and replaced his hand with his cock.

"Hannibal," Will cried out weakly, quivering.

The thumping motion of the older man's hips firmly rocking against him made more chaotic music fill the air, piano keys attacked with every thrust. Hannibal held Will's face at such an angle that he must meet the doctor's demanding eyes, glittering with adoration and neediness while his girthy, solid cock slid in deeper. By the time Hannibal lost his cool and rutted with animal savagery, the music they made had grown cacophonous as the blinding desire between them, Will's legs locked desperately around his hips, Hannibal grunting, the sound feral, full of gravel and fire. He spilled into Will with a sharp shove forward and scooped his body into a tight embrace. Will wrapped around him, clinging with arms and legs while Hannibal rode out his orgasm, pumping warm seed deep inside him, holding him so fiercely there would be purple fingerprints on Will's back and ass.

"I don't understand," Hannibal admitted, his breath rough and wild when he stared down at Will. He carried the younger man to the couch and held him on his lap, where they remained with eyes fastened on each other, incapable of looking away. "I cannot make sense of the tragedy in my past, and the joy I feel now. After everything I have done, somehow I am here with you."

"The happiness brings up the pain of the past," Will nodded, massaging his back.

"I thought I buried it all, but it has become clear to me that my love for you is equal, if not more life-shaping, to that I felt for my parents and sister. If I let myself think of you as family, and lose you…"

"You won't lose me," Will insisted, tipping his lover's chin up. Oh, that proud, noble, irresistible face. The elegance and the wildfire right under the surface, the palpable danger Will could taste in each moment he was exposed to Hannibal's influence. He still melted every time, just looking at his lover. "I promise."

“I want to compose for you across every medium I know,” Hannibal said intensely. His eyes were restless again, flitting around the room as his hands trailed over Will’s body, stroking down his spine, tracing his shoulders.

“I want to paint you with elements of blood and breath, and even that seems insufficient tribute to your radiance. I feel an irrepressible inspiration to affect change to the outside world, as your love is changing me. But there are parts of my life I have not yet shown you, and I fear it is a path you may not be able to follow.”

Will shivered with fascination. “I’ll follow you, Hannibal. I’d do anything for you and with you. Things maybe you can’t imagine. Acts I’ve already committed that feel as much a tribute to our love as what we just did, and that...I wanna show you. Do you think we’re ready?”

“I hope that we are, mylimasis.”

They both knew their secrets were converging. Each man suspected that their clandestine activities might be one and the same while fearing this was too wonderful to be the case, that everything would come tumbling down and they might lose one another after all. So they let the conversation fade, unwilling to venture forth until they felt more secure.

Hannibal never expected how soon he would find the next evidence that they were soulmates in the most profound, forbidden, glorious way imaginable.

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The next time Will woke, it was with his face crushed against Hannibal’s chest. The tickling of crisp grey hairs made his clamped-shut eyes flutter open as he realized he had once again grabbed his lover into a near suffocation of an embrace while sleeping. Even unconscious, he was insanely possessive, pleased to see the bruising around Hannibal’s neck while brushing his fingers over the matching bite mark on his own skin.

Hannibal had somehow managed to stay asleep despite having Will Graham wrapped around him like a crazed spider monkey, so the younger man took advantage of this chance to examine him in the morning light. He looked like a golden god, tawny soft hair gone fluffy with the disheveling influences of sex and sleep, his muscled arms and torso bathed in the warm glow from the front window. Will’s mouth watered as he admired this gorgeous man whom he could finally call his *own,* and he started to notice a few more marks on Hannibal’s body while looking closer.

There were several scars, which Will traced gentle fingers over...like shallow knife wounds, two short lines on Hannibal’s side, one longer scar dragged across his upper arm. The scars were lovely, silver-pink and sexy, yet Will felt a fierce dismay that someone else had marked his lover. The question was...who? Why would a dignified doctor have three knife scars, and...what about the faded yellow-blue bruises on his stomach? Will hadn’t left those. Had Hannibal been in a fight recently and not told him -- furthermore, was this something of a regular occurrence?

He was going to wake Hannibal up and ask him these questions. Maybe, probably. But the doctor woke on his own, humming contentedly to find Will sitting there gawking at him like an obsessed lovesick fool, which of course he was. Hannibal wrapped the blanket more warmly around them, covering Will's shoulders and drawing him close again. How could Will resist?

Inhaling deeply of Hannibal's bewitching cologne, Will rubbed his cheek against Hannibal's upper chest, then looked up at him enthralled. "Were we ever strangers?"

Hannibal gave him that adorable little musing, sleepy pout-smile and kissed his forehead. "It does seem hard to imagine. Perhaps we never were." He smelled Will's hair, brushing his hand over the younger man's ribs and around to his back. On the way, he barely grazed the pebbled burn scar which Will had recently obtained during a memorable fight with one of his victims.

The chef had been poisoning innocent people and yet with so subtle a method that there was insufficient evidence to put him behind bars or even get him fired from the popular French bistro where he worked his evil. Will managed to subdue him after hours, but in the struggle, the bastard tried to throw a pot of boiling water at him. Of course, Will was too fast for that, but a spray of the searing liquid had barely caught his side, eating through his shirt to leave a dark pink, bumpy mark.

Will sucked in a breath as Hannibal touched the tender scar, then remembered he also still had the messy but sufficient stitching on the underside of his left calf from where that child abuser had sliced into him during their grapple before Will handed the killing blow. He and Hannibal were usually so feverishly fast and greedy in their affections that they didn't spend much time just slowly canvassing each other's skin. Will was made newly aware he was covered in tiny wounds for which he had no reasonable excuse aside from "I got it in the field," which he supposed would be just barely sufficient.

That excuse was actually only true of the scar on his shoulder from his days as a cop in New Orleans.

He was so caught up in worry that Hannibal would start questioning his collection of odd injuries that he forgot to ask about Hannibal's, and he was just about to save them both by suggesting they go get some breakfast at the classiest out of Wolf Trap's three diners, when all of a sudden the doorbell rang.

Will's mouth was half-open on the intended breakfast inquiry, while Hannibal was looking at him now wide awake and endlessly curious, his hand sliding down to cup Will's calf. The younger man realized his lover had intended to carefully continue touching him all over in search of more scars, and his heart squeezed with equal parts suspense, stress, and the desperate desire to be fully open with Hannibal at last.

"Now who can that be?" Hannibal asked, very thoughtful still, fingers clasped over the subtle, small stitches on Will's leg.

"We better get dressed." Will snatched himself away in paranoia and called out in a louder voice, "Just a minute!"

Well, the crumpled white sheet on the floor by the piano wasn't going to be much help. He tossed Hannibal the discarded pajama pants and rushed up to his bedroom, where he hopped into grey sweatpants and grabbed two t-shirts at random from his bureau.

“Thank you, my dear,” Hannibal said, a little too archly as he pulled the shirt over his head. His mind was still working the mystery of Will’s scars, and he was more than aware that Will was being cagey even before they discussed it.

Despite his somewhat anxious mood and the distraction of wondering who was ringing his doorbell at 7am, Will couldn’t help laughing when he realized which shirts he had happened to snatch from his room.

Hannibal’s shirt featured a faded orange and blue horizon design, in front of which were the profiled figures of a bunch of dogs, varying breeds, with the slogan, *”Easily Distracted by Dogs.”* His own shirt had been a gag gift from Beverly, and featured a cartoonish image of a fish on a hook with the words *”Master Baiter.”*

Furthermore, Hannibal looked fucking divine in the most unexpected way, his hair sticking up in a few directions, the crinkles by his eyes slightly more pronounced first thing in the morning, and with Will’s ridiculous dog shirt absolutely glued to his firm pectorals and biceps. Still torn between confused worry that Hannibal would put two and two together about his murderous nature before he could come up with a good way to bring it up himself, and now dying to get him back into bed and fuck him silly in just the ridiculous dog t-shirt, Will was really annoyed that someone was once again jabbing at the doorbell.

He glanced once more at Hannibal’s mischievous smirk, the older man having clearly intuited his lustful line of thinking in addition to his bashfully overwhelmed secrecy.

Fuck, I’m too gay for this.

As near-impossible as it was to tear himself from the possibility of morning sex with Hannibal, Will got himself over to the front door. By the time he set eyes on an extremely annoyed Jack Crawford, the dogs woke up and started barking for their breakfast.

“Oh, sorry, Jack,” Will sighed, letting his boss inside. “I didn’t mean to leave you out here waiting.”

Jack waved off the apology, which had eased his irritated demeanor at being stuck on Will’s front porch on a bitter cold morning. “Well, it’s early and I’m unannounced. Which I wouldn’t have been, by the way, if you’d answer your damn phone.”

“Good morning, Jack,” Hannibal said lightly.

He was in the kitchen, getting the dogs’ food out while Will’s pets waited with excitement and bright eyes by his ankles, staring up at him beseechingly.

The scene could not have been more serenely, contentedly domestic; Hannibal fit right in here, part of the family, part of Will’s world. Jack took it in with a short nod, removing his hat and coat, which Will hung on the coat rack by the door.

Jack looked discerningly at their absurd apparel and bare feet, then studied the living room, including the sheet left by the piano bench because Will had been too distracted to remember he should get rid of it.

“Dr. Lecter. Don’t you gentlemen look sharp this morning.”

Far from offended, Hannibal gave a small bow and a pleased smile as he filled the dogs’ bowls. The pets eagerly started eating their homemade grub as Will grinned, adoring how proud Hannibal was to be marked even by wearing his funny t-shirt, proud that it was obvious they’d been up all night having sex to the extent Will had forgotten his phone even existed. Their shirt collars just barely covered the bright bruises they had left to claim each other with frantic, insistent heat.

Will scampered across the room about as casually as he could manage, grabbed the sheet, balled it up and popped into the bathroom to toss it in the laundry basket. He reappeared in the living room, bright eyed and bushy-tailed as his dogs but with a dutiful, expectant nod to Jack.

“Actually, I’m glad you’re both here,” Jack went on, more seriously, having repressed his one thousandth eye-roll at the brief scandal of the sheet and Hannibal’s continued smug expression. “I need to talk to you…*question* you, in fact.”

“Convenient then that we were together,” Hannibal answered, still glowing with pride, unflappable as to concern at Jack’s suggestion that he needed to interview them for some reason.

“Why don’t I get us some coffee and we’ll talk. You look tired, Jack.” Will made the offer smoothly, and Jack was grateful.

“That would be fantastic. I’m exhausted, actually.” Jack sat down at the table as Will plugged the coffee pot in. “Bella was up late binge-watching one of those Netflix shows and I sat up with her for emotional support, but now I feel like something the cat dragged in.”

Winston barked suspiciously at the mention of a cat.

“Sorry,” Jack told the dog. “And then we caught a new case. Didn’t get a wink of sleep last night.”

“Then, I will make pancakes,” Hannibal suggested brightly, having hunted through Will’s cabinet until he found a box of Bisquick buttermilk mix.

“Just hurry up. As much as I regret the circumstances, this isn’t a social call,” Jack reminded him sternly.

“I wonder why he’s here,” Will whispered as Hannibal frowned at the merry yellow box of pancake mix with its doubtless long list of artificial flavorings.

With a “beggers can’t be choosers” shrug, Hannibal poured powdered mix into a bowl and cracked a couple of eggs in.

“Do you have any theories as to why Jack would call on you in this manner?” He murmured.

Yes.

“No,” Will lied, biting the inside of his cheek, hating himself for the deception. He knew of course that Jack must be here because of the double-murder at the opera, which he had committed in the heat of jealous passion without caring for the consequences that had so swiftly arrived.

Will also knew he could wriggle his way out of this predicament easily enough; it remained to be seen if he could work out a solution to his lies with Hannibal using equal adeptness. The guilt over hiding the darkest layers of himself was really starting to take a toll, especially as it contrasted with the joy he had found in the doctor’s arms.

Hannibal didn’t open up easily, and while a man like him was more than worth the chase, Will worried that the reveal of his repeated lies would ruin the trust he had finally won from his lover. If it was lost, would he be able to restore it?

“I’m sure all will be well,” Hannibal said, noticing Will’s slightly flustered state. He heated a skillet on the stove and poured the pancake batter on to sizzle.

Will poured three mugs of steaming hot coffee and carried one over to a thankful Jack before letting the dogs go outside. The loyal pets knew better than to run past the confines of their large backyard. They were as well-trained as Will’s laser focused confidence, the charm he would need in surplus to finesse his way through this interview with Jack.

Jack seemed resigned to sip at his coffee for a few minutes while checking his phone as Will returned to the kitchen. He got back just in time to catch Hannibal sneakily tossing the contents of his box of Fruity O’s cereal into the trash.

“You are so busted. How dare you,” Will pouted, and Hannibal chuckled low in his throat before caging him against the sink.

Their hips almost brushed together, and Will’s head spun at how easily it was for the sexy games between them to resume. This wasn’t the time, but...damn.

“Daddy knows best, my dear,” Hannibal informed him.

He tweaked Will’s nose gently, then winked and returned to his work at the stove.

“I can take it upon myself to regularly stock your kitchen with healthful food, or else you can come and live with me. In either case, I must insist that you pay proper attention to your nutritional health.”

“What?” Will blinked, sure he must have misheard. Maybe anxiety and horniness had stuffed his ears with cotton. He blew on his coffee and took a sip, appreciating the quick fix of caffeine.

“Your choices as to cuisine influence every part of your health, including your mental health. Studies have linked poor eating habits with problems in executive functioning, and you

cannot continue working yourself into exhaustion whilst casually skipping meals or indulging handfuls of 'Fruity-O's' and those dreadful orange crackers I noticed in your cupboard. That color does not occur in nature, Will."

Hannibal tsked and flipped the pancakes with flawless competence, sending the delectable aroma of buttermilk into the air. If he was going to make Bisquick, they were still going to be next level perfect, or his name wasn't Hannibal freaking Lecter.

"Those are Cheez-its, and they are delicious, thank you very much," Will said, setting his coffee down and going to Hannibal's side.

His lover casually plated the fluffy pancakes and placed a pat of butter substitute onto each warm stack of breakfast yumminess.

"Au contraire, I very much *can* believe this is not butter," Hannibal complained, sighing before putting the small yellow tub back into Will's fridge.

He went on fussing, "I cannot understand why, with your stunning and flawless physique, you make such irrational and chaotic choices as to calorie cutting. A little butter fat is good for you, and light beer is absolutely repulsive. Yet, you consider sugar-riddled cereal a balanced meal."

"I do put milk in the cereal sometimes. Are you gonna be okay?" Will huffed a laugh and lightly tugged Hannibal's hair. The doctor, who had turned to the cabinet to take out a few glasses for orange juice, raised his eyebrows.

Will went on, "I can tell you're nervously babbling about my admittedly confusing dietary habits because you're worried I might not want to move in with you. Yes, I noticed the bomb you slipped in there. I mean, Jack's waiting, but you can keep up the snobby, adorable monologue if you want to. Or I could just say, hell yes, I'd love to live with you, Hannibal."

Hannibal had tried to provide a more elegant aesthetic by pouring the store brand maple syrup into a glass dispenser, but Will's profession caused him to fumble and spill some of the syrup on his hand.

"Truly?" He looked so innocent in that moment, completely enraptured.

"Truly." Will smiled and took his hand, sucking maple syrup from his index finger. Hopefully, Jack was still immersed in his many emails, because the half-wall between kitchen and dining area wasn't really hiding much.

Still, Hannibal smiled back and it was as if they were all alone in the whole universe, held by perfect intimacy.

"Madly," Will added, stealing a quick kiss from his lover's mouth. "Deeply. A thousand times yes. But you realize the dogs are coming with me, and I'm probably going to sneak boxes of Fruity O's sometimes."

Hannibal chuckled fondly. “Of course. I would have it no other way. The dogs bring you such happiness, they must go where you do. And as to your wretched sugar addiction...it gives me the welcome excuse for administering discipline.”

“Will you *stop*?” Will laughed and batted his long lashes coquettishly.

Hannibal slipped his hand through Will’s hair, brushing back a silky, perfect curl which had caught his eye. He paused in every way, cupping the back of Will’s neck, hypnotized by his darkly sweet renaissance angel, forgetting place, time, safety for his very heart and soul; nothing else could matter but to have Will close. Will felt Hannibal’s gaze almost like a surgeon’s blade and, appropriately, blushed, a flower possessed by the sun, leaning into that light, ready to burn.

The secrets between them glistened, beckoned, immersed them in welcome suspense and curiosity. Moving forward together was everything, and the rest they believed would fall in place, however jagged, sharp, deliciously cutting the pieces of themselves which they had not yet shared. It all lay ahead of them, endless, a dominion no one else could fathom. Even they could scarcely fathom it, only keep wandering forward, hand in hand.

“I do have a few other things to do today!” Jack’s voice boomed. He had kept his back to the kitchen politely, but his patience was again thinning.

“Oops,” Will grinned. “C’mon, before he combusts.”

The moment was not shattered; its shining enticement lingered like the sweetest aftertaste, now gently accompanied by understanding humor.

Hannibal smiled, patted Will’s blushing cheek, then picked up the plates of pancakes, putting the third one on his forearm with exceptional balance, so fluid and effortless. Will was part of Hannibal’s fluidity, a helpless substance of blood, breath and need flowing, falling.

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With matter-of-fact delivery and his usual subtle examination of the expressions and tones of those he interviewed, Jack explained about the new case that had kept him from sleep. Jack always seemed half-amused but deadly serious, Will thought...friendly but guarded, constantly thinking, dangerously close to seeing truths which for his own good he really should avoid. Will wanted Jack to avoid looking at him too clearly. He liked the man and wanted the best for him. This current situation was...awkward but he still hoped they could all survive it with their original relationships intact.

“Double murder?” Hannibal repeated with genuine surprise. “At the opera? How scandalous.”

“To say the least,” Jack replied.

He took a sip of juice and speared a bite of pancakes, looking back and forth between the profiler and therapist.

“I have to question you both because you were in attendance at last night’s performance. And Hannibal, I’m sorry but this is going to be especially shocking for you. One of the victims was a patient of yours, a Franklyn Froideveaux.”

“That man who came up to us during intermission,” Will frowned. “This is awful.”

Hannibal’s mouth dropped slightly open. He set his fork down and rapidly worked through a brief flash of sadness to hear of Franklyn’s demise. The young man had been rather obnoxious, but good-natured with only the best intentions. Furthermore, Franklyn’s loneliness had spoken to him of his own, helped him during sessions to contemplate his growing emotion towards Will, the desire to finally have a partner.

Still, regrettable as Franklyn’s death truly was, it saved him the mild inconvenience of confronting his patient about his inappropriate obsession with him, and the inevitable argument which would occur when he referred Franklyn to yet another therapist. And Hannibal was far, far more concerned with Will’s current attitude than the loss of Franklyn.

He remembered that Will had been bitterly jealous about all the admirers, the flirtatious attention Hannibal received at the opera, and Franklyn had been a main offender on this count. Will’s demeanor as Jack questioned them was *almost* perfectly believable. Anyone else would instantly accept Will as a man wholly astonished by this news and grieved, as well as mildly frightened by their own recent proximity to danger.

But Hannibal knew all about lies one told to cover murder, and he had gotten to know Will’s tells, too. The young profiler had a habit of quickly tugging his ear or his shirt sleeve, or else briefly biting the inside of his lower lip. In twenty seconds, Hannibal had seen Will do all three tics.

“Who else was killed?” Hannibal inquired, abandoning his food in his pretense of innocent dismay.

Really, the excitement growing inside him at the mere possibility of Will’s involvement in these crimes was blooming, warm and delightful.

“A friend of Franklyn’s, Baltimore-based violin teacher named Tobias Budge,” Jack recalled. “I’d show you the photos, Will, ask for your help but I can’t. Believe me, I wish I could get both of your insight on this, but…”

“Conflict of interest,” Will concluded. “I get it. Can you at least tell us time of death, and how they were murdered? Maybe we saw something, heard something…”

“Of course. Jimmy said lividity puts it around 8:30pm, which would have been during the second act of the show. It was a crowded audience, and people were coming and going all night, so it’s going to take us some time to question everyone and determine who exactly left their seats during that time.”

Hannibal was elated. *Who indeed had left their seat at that time!*

Hannibal sighed, pretending disappointment at his own limited understanding. "I'm sorry, Jack. I wish I had seen or heard anything out of order. We had a brief, cordial conversation with Franklyn, who introduced us to Tobias. It was a pleasant but superficial chat."

"The evening couldn't have seemed more orderly," Will shrugged, "Up until you told us about the murders."

Jack watched the other two men carefully. Hannibal could see the questions flickering in his dark brown eyes. The agent was trying to determine whether to add Dr. Lecter and Will to his list of possible suspects. After all, it was quite a coincidence that they had been at the opera and that Hannibal knew Franklyn. But then again, given the popularity of the show, almost anyone with an interest in the arts and money to spare might have bought a ticket. Furthermore, Hannibal's own feigned naivete matched nicely with Will's, especially as Will put on an act of frustration that he wasn't allowed to investigate.

If Hannibal was not mistaken, he and his lover had evaded Jack Crawford's suspicion. For now, at least.

"How did the FBI even get called in on this one?" Will asked. "No Ripper signs, and it's an isolated crime, isn't it?"

"I'm not so sure," Jack answered, dabbing a corner of his mouth with his napkin. "There's a chance I may need to bend the rules and bring you in on this later, Will. If my instincts are right, this is no isolated crime. I've been working up a file on a possible serial, a vigilante who's been slowly picking off all sorts of disreputable scumbags up and down the Chesapeake. Similar geographical range in the killings, but no Ripper M.O., no tableaus, organ trophies and so on."

"What kinds of disreputable scumbags are we talking about?" Will asked, lifting his brows.

"Those who...hurt innocents and evade lawful justice." Jack waved his fork between bites, accentuating his next point. "This vigilante is usually brutal in his attacks, I mean he tears people up. A lot of gashes and severed limbs, ripped-out eyes, entrails yanked and left in a pile by the bodies. But on two out of twenty murders which I believe to have been perpetrated by this individual, he was forced to act much more subtly, times where he killed in public settings under tight timing. They were strangled and left exactly as Froideveaux and Budge were."

"First I'm hearing of this vigilante case," Will noted, looking worried but intrigued. "I wish you'd let me help, Jack."

"I didn't want to say anything until I had enough substantial evidence to call it a case." Jack drummed his fingers on the table. "Let us handle the follow-up on Froideveaux and Budge. If I get the go-ahead to launch an investigation on the Vigilante, I plan to go back and canvas all of his crimes. Then I should be able to bring you in. Okay?"

"Okay." Will look a long sip of coffee and nodded, reluctantly resigned. He seemed so restless in his desire to assist, help Jack catch this vigilante, even Hannibal was almost convinced.

Dare he hope? Hannibal considered. More than just this isolated crime of Tobias and Franklyn, was his brilliant, beautiful boy a repeat offender like himself? Did Will know and indulge the glory of the hunt? What if there was no need for him to gradually trick or seduce Will into his darkness…

What if Will already lived and thrived there, and had merely been waiting for him? Soulmates, in the truest sense.

Oh, my darling. What wonders you hold, how you never cease to amaze me.

With this realization dawning in almost-certainty, Hannibal knew he must find a way to send Will a message in response to the one he had been given by his lover.

The murders of Franklyn and Tobias told Hannibal he belonged to Will, and no one else should *dare* desire him, attempt to claim him. A thrill shivered through him. He had so much to say to Will in return.

Chapter End Notes

Two cinematic inspirations were involved in this chapter: the *piano scene* in *Pretty Woman* (goddamn), and the scene in *Batman Returns* when Bruce and Selina are making out and notice each others' scars from their night lives as Batman and Catwoman (also dayum 🔥).

Side note, when writing AU's, I like to let Bella be healthy. She deserves the world and I love having her and Jack just be happy together 🥹

I know the murder part of the plot is a bit slow-burny, but it's amping up more now 😈. I must admit that writing fluff is extremely comforting for me, so I'll probably continue being pretty indulgent with it...forever lol 🖤. Thanks for reading!!

Just let me adore you

Chapter Notes

This is (another) fluffy, smutty (smutty, smutty) chapter. More plot to come, really!

cw: potentially bothersome dirty talk: Will is termed a slut (affectionate) in this chapter. Also, brief references to knife play.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

One Week Later

Hannibal sat in his office, across from a patient, attempting dutiful attentiveness and concern, yet subtly distracted because he had noticed the light flash of his phone on the desk. A text had come through. He assumed it was a message from Will, who would be bringing his dogs and some personal belongings over later.

There was no rush to sell Will's house; Hannibal said they could keep it as Will's fishing cabin, much to the younger man's spoiled delight. Will was therefore in no hurry to bring every single one of his earthly possessions over; it could be a gradual, relaxed process. The important thing was that they would be living together, a fact that made Hannibal's heart skip a beat.

The patient, a young man named Stephen, was going on at some length with complaints regarding his college and their insistence that he take general education courses instead of only classes related to his major.

"You know, the classes that I'm paying to go to college for?" Stephen fumed, his slightly hyper rant making Hannibal realize his eyes had wandered again to the phone on his desk, his fingers twitching on the armrest of his chair in the desire to make a wild grab and read Will's message.

Had work always been this tiresome? The amusement of playing with his patients' minds and morphing some them to murder had once formed one of his fondest hobbies. Stephen, for example, clearly had latent violent instincts. The slightest cultivation of them on Hannibal's part would prove fruitfully destructive, but the project had lost its initial zest for him.

Just another potential killer. None of them could compare with Will.

"I understand you are quite frustrated," Hannibal noted, incapable of caring less for the young man's pathetic so-called problem. "Although you may wish to find a better system to express your feelings, rather than sending insulting emails to your professors. Have you tried journaling?"

Stephen's disrespectful presumption on this academic subject was quite enough to have him transferred from the "possible murder protege" to "future victim" rolodex.

When 7:30 mercifully arrived, Hannibal was pleased to be liberated from the dull, grinding appointments which had filled his day. The only enjoyable part of the eight hours had been his lunch, which he had spent at his desk eagerly poring over every Tattlecrime article he had bookmarked on this tablet for review. Freddie Lounds had, of course, been on the scene gathering all of the brutal details of the Vigilante's murders from the start...but she had never strung the murders together as the work of one person. It had taken Jack Crawford's unique ingenuity; even Freddie's razor-sharp eyes had failed to make the connections, which Hannibal could well understand.

Will had been clever, which came as no surprise. He never left a shred of evidence. And while many of the killings were gruesomely enacted, seldom were the very same methods employed. In fact, Hannibal was fairly certain that a few recent deaths which had been ultimately labelled as animal attacks were actually Will's work as well.

The Vigilante's work dated back to what would have been Will's time at the FBI Academy. He had relocated from Louisiana to Virginia after a couple of years as a police officer in New Orleans. His parents had moved to Wolf Trap around the same time, a huge uprooting of their established life, all to make sure they remained close to their son. Still, there would always be clients seeking therapists and boat owners needing assistance with repairs, in any state.

Hannibal could empathize with Maddie and Travis' priority to keep the family together. Perhaps through his association with the Grahams, he was gaining a much better understanding of how a happy family actually functioned. He had never experienced such a bond, outside of his relationship with dear, brilliant, kind little Mischa. While he had admired his noble parents, it was in the way one might look up to a distant star, always out of reach. They had not been as cold as his Uncle Robertus, however. Once, he had been close to his Aunt Murasaki, but even that had become...complicated, eventually untenable.

He suspected that Will had probably been killing long before the move further north...if his lover was anything like himself, he had first murdered as a teenager, and learned through repeated experience how to hone his skills since then.

With a thoughtful smile, Hannibal picked up his phone at long last and opened the text from Will, to find his lover had stopped for coffee on the way to *their* house in Baltimore.

"I got your favorite," Will had sent, along with a photo of himself looking irresistible as ever in a thin green henley shirt under a grey blazer.

Hannibal loved the way the color of the shirt brought out emerald gleams in Will's eyes, and the low-cut collar, the flimsy nature of the fabric were quite...thought-provoking as well. Will was grinning in the selfie, holding up a beverage which Hannibal easily recognized as an iced oat milk latte, which would still be cold and fresh by the time he got home. He was fairly sure they would arrive at around the same time, and sent back a quick reply.

"I'll see you very soon, my dear. What did you have from the coffee shop?"

Playfully, Hannibal guessed Will would not want to admit the truth about this. He chuckled at the reply, especially the blushing, mortified emoji which Will included.

Will: *"There might have been a peppermint mocha frappuccino...with whipped cream and chocolate sauce."*

Hannibal: *"And?"*

Will: *"And I got homemade biscuits for the dogs. They've been so good all day."*

Will's attempted change of subject did not fool Hannibal for a second.

Hannibal: *"And?"*

Will: *"And...well...they had these brownies…"*

Hannibal sighed, shrugging his coat on and retrieving his car keys from the pocket. He shut all the lights off in his office and locked up, striding confidently to the Bentley. Once seated behind the wheel, he sent back, *"And what did you have for breakfast and lunch earlier?"*

Will: *"....."*

Hannibal: *"Did you have breakfast and lunch, William?"*

A long pause. Will knew Hannibal only called him by his full first name when he was being extra stern.

Will sent a photo of himself, back in the van he had rented for conveying a few boxes of his possessions and the dogs to their new home. He was pouting, his adorably plush lower lip sticking out.

Will: *"Okay, I really meant to have a bowl of the oatmeal you made me, but I forgot because I had an early start at work and I was tired. When I realized I was hungry, it was after my morning lecture, so I grabbed a bagel from the break room. I also thought I'd get a salad for lunch but then I had to canvas a crime scene and work up another profile on this killer who cut her best friend's face off. To be honest it killed my appetite…Sorry, this is too long for a text, Can I see you at home?"*

Hannibal: *"See you shortly x"*

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"Hey, handsome," Will grinned.

He had arrived home prior to Hannibal and settled the dogs in the area Hannibal had designated for them in the study.

"We love the new pillows," he added, greeting Hannibal with a kiss to his cheek while the older man ran a possessive hand through his curls and gripped the back of his head.

“You didn’t have to do all this.” Will was still blushing.

While he referred to the series of expensive luxury dog pillows (white faux sherpa fur) which Hannibal had arranged neatly for the dogs, the doctor knew his flushed state had nothing to do with the gifts and everything to do with his nutritional lapse.

“I intend to spoil you terribly, mylimasis,” Hannibal muttered, eyes darkly intent. “What do you think about that?”

“Nobody ever spoiled me before,” said Will with a boyish smile. “My parents are generous, but sensible, and I guess that made me act the same. But there’s something about the idea of you spending tons of money to give me things I don’t need that, um...drives me a little crazy in a *good* way. To say the least.”

“Good boy,” Hannibal smiled, enjoying the way Will’s eyes were all over him, drinking in his own attire, which admittedly bore an especially paternalistic appearance.

He wore a red zippered sweater over a white button-up shirt and below his tan plaid suit, his hair slicked back. Will looked from his outfit to his smile that was somehow very serious and assessing, and gulped.

Hannibal’s latte was waiting for him on the counter when they wandered into the kitchen. He took a few sips of the creamy, earthy beverage and waited for Will to notice the next treat he had set up in anticipation of this day.

Will let out a happy gasp, discovering the seven black ceramic dog bowls which had been personalized, each dog’s name appearing in gold cursive. They sat on top of a new mat, which was patterned with a cute dog paw print, quite whimsical for the pristine Dr. Lecter.

“This is amazing, thank you so much,” Will gushed. “I feel...welcome here, like you’re willing to make room and change a few things to have us with you.”

“I’m pleased that you are pleased, mylimasis.” Hannibal sipped his drink again, thoughtfully, then set it aside and invited, “Shall we go to the bedroom now? There is a certain matter I wish to discuss with you.”

“Um...okay,” Will agreed, blushing again and tugging at the collar of that tempting little green shirt.

They had barely gotten through the bedroom door before Hannibal had Will pressed to him, holding him in a vice grip, Will’s back to his front. “I understand your little games, Will.”

“Whatever do you mean?”

Will had moaned loudly whilst being grabbed and manhandled, bringing a grim smile to his lover’s face. Now the impish boy *whispered,* so innocently.

Hannibal was getting hard quite quickly, influenced by the combination of Will’s exaggerated, naive surprise and the naughty intentions under the surface.

“I mean that you claim to have eaten so chaotically today and then had too much sugar before dinner, quite by chance.” Hannibal breathed hotly against Will’s ear, then tugged it with his teeth, his palm planted firmly to the front of Will’s shirt. “I believe you did it intentionally to provoke me. I think you want to be punished.”

“Oh, but Daddy, I’m sorry,” Will moaned unconvincingly.

Hannibal pinned his arms behind his back and pushed him against the wall with such force that the lamp on the nearby table rattled.

“You are?” Hannibal hissed in his ear, then rubbed his hard-on between Will’s clothed ass cheeks, making his lover gasp. “Should I accept that half-hearted apology and let you go? We could go downstairs and begin making dinner together, talk about each of our days politely, if you prefer.”

“I *don’t* prefer,” Will gritted out, and Hannibal smirked at how desperate he was already.

The wicked boy had been waiting, planning for this all day. It was the least Hannibal could do to bring the handsome profiler’s naughty dream into reality.

“You need Daddy’s discipline?”

“Y-yes, Daddy, please...please.” Will batted his eyelashes and pouted, having determined that this was the secret code for getting absolutely anything in the world he wanted from Hannibal.

Hannibal released him, then gave him a light push towards the bed. Will hesitated, waiting on his next order.

With a brief curl of his lip and a huff of exasperated arousal, Hannibal said firmly, “Strip.”

He went to the bureau and opened the secret compartment of the left lower drawer. The right drawer’s secret compartment contained a collection of beautiful knives, but he could wait for another night to introduce that kink to their sex life.

Sitting obediently on the bed, entirely bared in all his beauty, hard and needy, Will bit his lip when he saw the leather paddle in Hannibal’s hand.

“Tell me what this says,” Hannibal demanded, holding the paddle up for Will’s closer examination.

“*Slut*,” Will read the red letters engraved deeply on the black leather and blushed even more furiously.

“That’s right.” Still fully dressed, Hannibal sat down on the bed and patted his plaid-suited knee. “Now come to Daddy.”

Will lay across his knee and shivered in anticipation as Hannibal began to slowly stroke his pale, shapely ass.

“What safeword would you like to use?” Hannibal inquired, fuming, bristling with the desire to begin. Yet his tone remained ever so cordial, letting just a hint of his heated impatience show.

“Motel.” Will smiled softly at the reference to their first night together in Minnesota, and Hannibal caressed his tender flesh again, longing, in awe.

“You are so very exquisite, my darling.” Hannibal drew the paddle slowly, teasingly across Will’s ass, letting him feel the firmness of the leather. “Do you like this?”

“I want you to use it. Hard,” Will begged.

“You really are a slut, aren’t you?” Hannibal shook his head, snarling again, his heartbeat thudding in his ears. “For whom are you a naughty, insatiable little cock slut?”

“For you, Daddy, only you. I’d do anything to get you to fuck me. I’m greedy.” Will’s big blue eyes watched him eagerly, excited, unafraid. His skin was so warm and smooth under Hannibal’s hand, every detail of him a dream come true.

“Will.” Gravely now. “Are you allowed to skip meals, and to have sweet drinks and desserts before dinner?”

“No, Daddy. I’ve been very bad.”

Hannibal nodded. “On that we agree.”

With that, he drew his hand back and slapped Will’s ass with the paddle. Expertly, he applied the toy in such a way that Will felt the softness and sting of the leather in equal parts, not so hard as to satisfy Will’s request, but rather to give him *almost* yet not nearly enough.

“Oh, harder, please,” Will pleaded, trying to grind into Hannibal’s thigh. This earned him a firmer spanking, five quick, harsher blows which left the word “Slut” imprinted in lovely pink upon one side of Will’s pert, perfect ass.

“Terrible boy,” Hannibal accused, his voice a breathy rasp while Will’s moans grew high-pitched and ecstatic, plush, wet pink lips slack against the bedding, his pretty fingers clutching the smooth teal blanket, cute toes twitching with every spank.

“Shameless little slut for Daddy. You’re to eat solid, healthful meals throughout the day and keep well-hydrated. If you behave better, you may have dessert after dinner and then only, one that *I* will prepare for you. Do you understand?”

He paused in the punishment, breathing hard with need to be seated devastatingly deep inside his gorgeous boy. *Mine, all mine. Meant for me…*

“Don’t stop, Daddy, please. I promise I’ll be good from now on…”

Hannibal growled, “I don’t believe you” before administering the roughest spanking yet, printing the “slut” slogan in red this time on Will’s other ass cheek.

“Oh, *God,* God,” Will whined, eyes rolling back in blissful pain. Tears squeezed from his crystal cerulean eyes, and he licked his lips, still longing for more.

“My beautiful little brat.” Hannibal’s heart squeezed with confusing, adoring fury as even more indulgent feelings made his heart feel incredibly full. His formerly neat hair spilled over his sweaty brow and he palmed Will’s reddened ass possessively.

“I do love to spoil you,” he admitted, staring at Will’s enraptured expression and naughtily marked body, enthralled, helplessly fixated, obsessed. “Perhaps I’ll go on and on, and never stop. You’ll be uncontrollably demanding and selfish, and I’ll have to keep finding new ways to take it further.”

Hannibal leaned over to get the lube from the nightstand, still holding Will firmly to his lap with his other hand, gently stroking the skin he had marked.

“We’ll...never get bored,” Will sighed, trembling harder when he realized Hannibal’s next intention, felt his Daddy’s big fingers circling his hole. Hannibal had abandoned the paddle. “Yes, your hands now, oh, please…”

“I could never, ever be bored with you, my incomparable Will.”

Hannibal slicked Will’s entrance and teased it slowly with one finger before carefully pressing in, starting a gradual back and forth motion of his thick digit in the tight but beckoning heat. When he could finger-fuck Will in earnest, he resumed the spanking, keeping it to softer slaps on Will’s less marked cheek. Hannibal had entered an erotic daze, higher with every moan, every precisely targeted glide of his hand evoking Will’s mind-melting pleasure.

He could no longer recall how sex used to be nothing more than yet another of his entertaining areas of expertise; he understood in some distant way that the pleasure was once a fleeting, hollow distraction. Now it meant so much that it tore him apart and put him back together.

“Hannibal,” Will whimpered, fingers seeking frantic purchase again in the bedding. His luscious skin bounced so prettily with every light spank from the flat of Hannibal’s hand, as with his other one, the older man buried his finger deeper, igniting a volcanic cascade of bliss within Will. “*Hannibal!* Fuck, I -- yes, yes, yes, right fucking *there*--”

He came so hard he cried, his tears leaking down his soft pink face and wetting the blanket, his cum spurting all over Hannibal’s perfectly elegant suit pants.

“That’s my good boy,” Hannibal praised, besotted. “I don’t quite know how you manage to be my very good, precious beautiful boy and my wicked, sinful little brat at the same time. But you do have me thoroughly addicted.”

As Hannibal petted through his sweaty curls and cooed more praise, Will moaned, moving with trembling limbs to straddle the older man’s lap.

“Hurts,” Will sighed, wrapping his arms around Hannibal’s neck as the doctor held his hip in one hand and swept a desirous hand down the side of his body with the other. “What you’ve done to me. And not just the spanking, which...I love, you know I do.”

His smile did indeed look pained suddenly, even more angelic for the pang of something inconsolable. Hannibal clasped his face and asked raspily, “What else hurts, Will?”

“My heart. I never wanted anyone like this and now...I don’t want to do almost anything else...just this,” Will said in an aching tone.

He kissed Hannibal’s mouth with wet, searching devotion, their tongues moving in languorous, endlessly aroused harmony.

“And this,” Will gasped, reaching down to feel the large, urgent bulge of Hannibal’s erection through his pants. He knew it was all for him, and finally it was alright for Hannibal to know this and still feel safe. “I need more, so much more.”

Yes. He was all for Will, and Will would never be satisfied, would always want more, *always* keep him guessing, and that was perfect.

Hannibal had noticed how Will said, ”I don’t want to do *almost* anything else,” and he knew, knew what the one other activity was Will craved, that they should join in the bloody majesty of the hunt together, make love bathed in the viscera of their victims, those who would be sacrificed on the altar of their brutally regal love. They could paint the world together, make it new, so much better, soaked in delicious evil.

Soon, so soon. Hannibal’s heart beat faster.

Will slid from him, stood on wobbly legs and went to the full-length mirror mounted on the opposite wall, right in front of the bed. He looked over his shoulder to see the word Hannibal had left on his stinging, aching, sensitive skin, and traced the letters in obvious satisfaction. From the marveling gleam of Will’s eyes, Hannibal wondered if he would indeed like to be permanently scarred by his hand one day. The idea of them leaving their claims upon each other’s skin for life was intoxicating.

“So nice of you to buy me another present, Daddy,” Will smiled, charming. He really did want more.

Hannibal’s waning patience shattered. He took his own clothes off quickly and got the lube, so Will started moving back towards the bed.

“No, stay there,” Hannibal insisted. “On the floor. Hands and knees, naughty little cock slut.”

Will grinned, which was also very provoking, and got into position, his palms and knees planted on the beige and white paisley rug.

“I love your everything,” Hannibal sighed, parting Will’s cheeks and gliding his slick cock between them, breaching his lover with slow but firm insistence.

Will's head dropped down as he moaned loudly, and Hannibal gripped his curls to bring him back up, arching his back as his hips met the younger man's ass.

"Your darkness, your hidden layers," Hannibal got out on stuttering breaths, his voice whiskey-thick with emotions and pleasure, rich with need. Their skin was hot and damp, slipping and sliding together wonderfully. "I'll give you anything you want, Will."

"I just want you," Will groaned, moving his ass back to meet every more urgent thrust as Hannibal grew passionately rough.

"You know you have me." Hannibal shifted their position, fucking Will up on his knees so that their stretched bodies were easily visible in the large mirror in front of them.

The rug burned their knees with each savage push of Hannibal's rigid length inside Will. The doctor gripped his lover tight against him, delving his cock to the hilt and gasping into Will's ear, "Look at us. You can tell me anything...and I'll tell you everything."

Will's eyes had been clamped tightly shut as he took Hannibal in with shaky, whimpering joy. He opened them now and stared at their reflection, at Hannibal's face so lost in lust and worship, not a trace of pride except for pure, arrogant delight in what they were together, how beautiful and destined. The power in the vulnerability they shared was palpable, terrifying, sweet. He looked at Hannibal's strong body fucking him hard and holding him in place and his own naked shamelessness, giving into every thrust and begging for more. The visual feast sent him into completion again, spilling into Hannibal's hand stroking him in time with the merciless thrusts, and Hannibal following soon after.

Will crumpled against him and Hannibal held him close, the way Will liked it, too tight, almost a constriction. A promise never to let go.

"You feel like heaven on earth, sweet boy." Hannibal kissed his sweaty brow and Will laughed shortly, a new shade of tender fear lacing through his mood of afterglow.

"What if I'm much more like hell?" Will asked, nuzzling into Hannibal, kissing his chest over the thundering heartbeat.

"Hell looks very different depending on your perspective on life." Hannibal slid a hand through Will's hair, back and forth in a rhythmic, calming caress.

His boy smelled of amber, vanilla and cederwood, sex, mingled excitement and fear. A beguiling cocktail that had him inhaling deeply, massaging Will to help bring him down from the thrill of a second, deeper orgasm and his brave attempts to breach the thinning remaining fortress walls between them.

"Perhaps hell looks like heaven to me," Hannibal added, the certainty in his tone taking Will by surprise.

Will fell silent, clinging to him, shivering into every warming touch.

"What is it, my dear?" Hannibal asked with some concern.

“I don’t know.” Will glanced up at him, tremulous. The brilliant, confident profiler. The bold, ruthless vigilante. He was a hapless mess for the first time in his life, and Hannibal knew the feeling. Being so bewildered at the avalanche of new emotions bearing down on him, with no recourse but to fall deeper.

“I just need you to take care of me,” Will admitted. “I don’t know anything else right now. Is that okay?”

“So much more than okay.” Hannibal smiled and rubbed his cheek against Will’s curls, hugging even tighter.

***

Hannibal gave Will a long, indulgent bubble bath, the frothy soap scented with cut flowers and watercress. He scattered peach drift rose petals over the thickly immersing bubbles, then helped Will into the comforting heat of the bath. The young man sank into the water with a deep sigh.

Will remained quiet, leaning into Hannibal’s touch while the older man slowly washed his hair, massaging in the shampoo with a fresh minty scent that left a cool tingle in its wake. He followed every softly spoken command as Hannibal bade him tip his head back to rinse his sopping curls, then slipped easily back into his lover’s embrace when the doctor joined him in the water.

Later, he curled up on the cozy chair in the corner of Hannibal’s kitchen, wearing nothing but the older man’s v-neck red sweater over his underwear.

“Can’t I do anything to help?” Will asked with a soft smile. It was the first time he had spoken in at least an hour. He had merely bestowed a puppy dog gaze and continued obedience when Hannibal towel dried him, brushed his hair, dressed him.

Quiet piano music played in the background from Hannibal’s phone plugged into speakers, Debussy, smooth and tender as the flow of water over riverstones and down a stomach-plunging waterfall.

Hannibal looked up from his place at the center island where he stood kneading dough, an assortment of intricately selected cut vegetables, cheeses and other culinary mysteries spread on the counter beside him with organized precision. He wore the silly dog t-shirt, which he had kept after the morning at Will’s, and his black silk boxers, his hair still damp from the bath.

“I want what you want, Will.” Hannibal went on forming the dough into a flatbread, adding olive oil and sea salt, occasionally pausing to look at his lover with doting happiness. “Simply to take care of you for the rest of the night. I could never want more than this, for you to stay there and relax, feel everything you need to. Let me see to all else.”

Will sighed, the too-long sleeves of Hannibal’s sweater wrapping around his tugging, savoring fingers. “Okay, Daddy.”

***

“You made me pizza,” he said with a delighted, surprised giggle when Hannibal had plated their food, seated Will at the place of honor at his long dinner table, poured the wine and waited cheerfully for the younger man’s appraisal of the meal.

“Fancy, fussy pizza, but...comfort food,” Will continued, and Hannibal gave a small nod with a prideful smile, blushing. “Something I would like. It’s perfect.”

“Then it suits you,” Hannibal acknowledged, “But this seating arrangement leaves something to be desired.”

He drew his own chair back and patted his leg. Will laughed again, the sweetest music, and climbed into Hannibal’s lap, where his lover fed him delectable little bites of the pizza, placing each one on Will’s tongue, allowing the younger man to suck, nip and lap at his fingers between morsels of food.

“Olive oil flatbread with ‘nduja, parmesan and anchovies,” Hannibal food-splained, knowing Will enjoyed his egotistical, self-congratulatory speeches about his recipes. “The ‘nduja is a spicy salami spread, which, paired with the softness of buffalo mozzarella and the arresting, prickly bite of anchovies…”

“Salty,” Will pondered, lavishing his tongue around Hannibal’s thumb, then gently biting the pad of his index finger. “Spicy. I love it.”

Hannibal gave him a sip of sparkling shiraz with notes of sweet plum and blackcurrant. He kissed the ripe black fruit taste from Will’s lips until they lost control again. It was easy, when Will reached down and took him in hand with loving strokes, easy to slide back into that heavenly heat, still loose and ready, Will riding him and kissing him nonstop, bringing them fast back over the edge. The pleasure burned through them so powerfully, giving them the hellish envelopment in danger they craved; before either knew what was happening, they had bitten into each other’s lips so that blood bubbled from them both in small sliver-cuts, flavoring their sloppy kisses.

The taste of Will’s blood, especially when it mixed with his own, made Hannibal’s hips spasm roughly up into his lover while he came, filling Will with his warm release, his nails digging into the strong, firm skin of Will’s back.

Will grabbed Hannibal’s shoulders fiercely, increasing his lover’s pleasure by bouncing expertly on his cock, his eyes going huge and bright when he, too, came with a ragged moan, blood dripping from his lower lip, a greedy boy who had been allowed entirely too much of what he liked best.

“There is dessert, too,” Hannibal sighed wryly, and Will bit his neck with another decadent giggle. Hannibal wanted to make him laugh and bring him pleasure a million times.

Chapter End Notes

Listen. During a perfectly innocent search for examples of spanking paddles, I happened upon this particular one: https://www.lovehoney.com/bondage/spankers-ticklers/spanking-paddles/p/sportsheets-leather-slut-slapper-paddle/a3331g3331.html

Anything that happened after that is clearly not my fault 😇

Here is the pizza recipe: https://www.delicious.com.au/recipes/one-hot-minute-pizza-nduja-parmesan-pickles-chilli-recipe/o25uea6p?r=recipes/collections/9d4s0yiz

Also, I broke the cardinal rule about Hannibal not calling Will "William," but every once in a while it feels right to me, so there it is 😄

Next time, Hannibal gets pushed out of his comfort zone again in fun ways. Meanwhile, I think a past acquaintance of Will's really should watch out.

A million little stars spelling out your name

Chapter Notes

> The song for this chapter is "Untouchable" by Taylor Swift. Playlist updated with all songs included to date: https://open.spotify.com/playlist/4WeoEljZNjydQouKxoEISf?si=bae65e190f9a4056

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Carter Jackson owned a vintage record shop on an artsy street in Baltimore. The formerly industrial, run-down area had recently been renovated into hipster-chic spaces and was now dotted with speak-easies, bookstores with bars in them where navel-gazers could sip literary themed cocktails and pore moodily over Kerouac and Ginsberg, and vintage clothing stores perfect for repurposing overpriced historic attire into glibly ironic posturing.

On his way to Train Stop Records, Hannibal noticed when he passed by the Avalon, an art house cinema where Carter most likely met Will. He could picture it easily, as he paused in the mid-afternoon, sleepy Sunday cold winter sunlight, gazing through his expensive designer sunglasses at the large posters in the windows for screenings of Truffaut, Godard, and Wong Kar-wai films, even an upcoming series in film noir which he knew Will would love.

His darling boy would be automatically attracted to such a place, with his love of great and challenging cinema, but it should have been *Hannibal* taking him on those dates, holding his hand at the movies, stealing kisses. It infuriated him to imagine Carter eying Will up in the lobby on some rainy evening when the profiler dipped into the theater to wile the evening away with a dreamy, evocative film. Will always said he liked the movies that tickled his brain and promised to show all of his favorites to Hannibal.

A confident, independent boy like Will would have no qualms about going to a movie alone, but after purchasing his ticket and turning around, perhaps Carter was waiting there with a friendly smile and the offer of buying him a glass of wine with which to enjoy the film. A bit of movie talk, a few pointed glances and flirtatious smiles later, Carter might have earned himself the honor of sitting with Will in the theater.

Hannibal fumed to think of what might have happened after that, but he had not been able to stop thinking about it with jealous, enraged obsession, since he was first introduced to that loathsome Carter who still saw fit to put his eyes all over Will like he owned him.

Will had gone fishing, happily promising to bring some beautiful trout home for Hannibal to cook as their dinner. They had been living together in domestic bliss for two weeks, while Hannibal waited for the ideal time to finally enact his vengeance upon Will’s would-be former paramour.

Today would really be the ideal time to begin the project. Killing Carter was no quick task, but a slow, methodical one which would take numerous days to complete. First, Hannibal would kidnap the man and hold him in one of his many local properties so that he could carry out the slow, meticulous torture at his leisure.

And when it was over, when this was done Will would *see*. He would understand who Hannibal was at his core. Will would know how terribly he was loved.

Hannibal still felt the anxiety over revealing his true self to Will, removing the final layer of his person suit to show off the monster underneath, but neither could they be fully as one until they were entirely naked in the light of each other's soul. Gleaning the clues to Will's own murderous proclivities had opened him in ways he had never experienced before, the hope no wistful dream, but a glimmering future, almost a certainty.

Obnoxiously loud punk rock music assaulted Hannibal's ears as soon as he let himself into the record store. It was not that the music itself was bad, but that it had been turned so loud in order to *prove* the coolness of this establishment, he rolled his eyes and dragged a finger over the nearest assortment of records as another evil thought occurred to him. He savored the inspiration with zest and began hunting through the large collection of classic rock records, vaguely cataloguing his fellow customers.

There were two young women with many piercings and tattoos who were clearly in love, lingering near a rack of assorted accessories, picking out some patches to iron onto each other's messenger bags. They were charming, and Hannibal smiled, recognizing true romance wherever he saw it these days.

A middle-aged man in a fedora examined a Rolling Stones record from every angle to make sure the packaging was in mint condition. A "nerd" loner obsessing over details to try and shield himself from the pain of his isolation, which only increased as the years yawned on. Hannibal felt a stab of pity, thinking how he used to be just like that without even realizing it until he met Will.

A smattering of assorted boho-chic intellectuals, cool rock boys and confused parents seeking gifts for their emo teen children filled the shop, making Hannibal realize with annoyance that this was a quite successful business. The strategic location at the beating heart of hipster culture in the city was perfect for attracting plenty of regulars and random foot traffic. No one else seemed bothered by the scratchy, overloud cacophony of The Clash and Replacements boring into Hannibal's skull, but he resolved to punish Carter for the rude volume issue in addition to his other sins, and that eased the potential headache.

After looking with pickiness almost equivalent to the Rolling Stones fan he had observed, Hannibal found what he sought, a record with a sepia-tinted cover, bearing an image of a man in a baseball cap, a cigarette stub perched between his fingers. It was the Elliott Smith record which featured the song Will had sung along to the night they drove from the opera to the rib house. Hannibal's heart squeezed at the memory of the nervous-happy look on Will's face while he drove and sang,
"*Drink up one more time, and I'll make you mine*
Keep you apart, deep in my heart

Separate from the rest, where I like you the best
And keep the things you forgot..."

That look on Will's face, the nervousness that ignited the electric-winged butterflies in his own stomach, it belonged to Hannibal alone. He felt again the low rumble of the car's engine, the bumps in the country roads Will drove down, smelled Will's excited infatuation and heard the adorable glide of his Southern accent over the familiar lyrics.

The quiet intimacy of a moment like that, the trust, the delicate yet somehow menacing romantic hope, it was theirs to share. Hannibal turned the record over between his hands, considering his decisions. Will would love this gift, and it would also be an important hint to him of what Hannibal was about to do.

He waited in the line leading to the register where Carter stood wearing an oatmeal-beige t-shirt with the single word *"okay"* in white font against a small black rectangle. A red scarf with a tiny white polka dot pattern was looped casually around Carter's neck, and atrocious brown corduroy trousers finished off the look.

The man looked like a walking advertisement for F. Scott's, the vintage clothing shop with exorbitant price tags which was located next door to Train Stop Records. Much to Hannibal's irritation, Carter carried off the pretentious attire with effortless flair, and he was very handsome in a certain conceited, trendy way.

Out of all the many reasons to despise the man, his resemblance to Hannibal ranked almost at the top. It bothered Hannibal beyond description to know that Will had a *type*, a sort of look and personality to the men he had dated previously: older men with silvering hair and big egos expressed through a carefully curated fashion aesthetic. Hannibal was not just the next one in a line of lovers in Will's life, he was *the* lover, Will's soulmate. Carter was nothing more than a pale, pathetic facsimile, a misleading preview on the path to whom Will really needed, but Hannibal's jealous, possessive nature would not stand for him to remain alive.

He was going to enjoy this kill, even more than usual. He *relished* the idea of making Carter suffer for touching, kissing his Will, desiring him...had they slept together? He flexed the fingers of his free hand as a vein throbbed in his forehead. He was going to tear Carter Jackson limb from limb, rip his throat out with his teeth, crush his skull with his foot...but not until he had plentiful fun making him suffer agonies beyond what any previous Ripper victims had endured. Then he and Will would feast upon his organs, forever bonded and united.

During Hannibal's wait in line, Carter had wasted time and made numerous other customers stand here longer than necessary so that he could indulge long, snobbishly specific, show-offy tangents with each music fan who approached. Carter spoke loudly enough even to be heard above the infernal racket he called music, with his observations such as "Maybe, but no one will ever touch Lindsay Buckingham's intricate guitar work on tracks like 'Big Love.' It may be a rock faux pas because Fleetwood Mac are now considered so generic, but I'll stand my ground on that."

Hannibal's fury worked inside him like clock gears tightening. He was about to detonate. Will loved Fleetwood Mac and had made a similar comment to Hannibal about

Buckingham's contributions. He *hated* that there was a shared world of interests between Carter and Will, in which he himself possessed only a passing beginner's knowledge gained from loving Will and hanging on his every word, cataloguing each like and dislike to memory.

Fortuitously enough, the playlist ended just as Hannibal finally got to the front of the line, the cessation of racket coinciding with Carter taking the record from Hannibal with a cursory, "Oh, great choice, man, you're going to love this," along with the automatic assumption, from a quick glance at this customer's tailored three piece suit, that he must have no prior familiarity with the music.

"It's a gift, actually," Hannibal returned with a smug, small smile.

Carter looked up for a longer time, his periwinkle eyes finally registering recognition. "Oh, hello again," he chirped, "What a coincidence. I guess this must be for Will, then."

His jaw had tensed slightly, and Hannibal could tell he was annoyed by the clear implication that far from a flash in the romantic pan such as he had been, Hannibal was still very much in Will's life.

"Yes, I thought I could probably find something to his taste here, given your eclectic offerings. It is so entirely delightful to pamper Will, I must admit I buy him presents nearly every day." Hannibal haughtily slid his sleek black credit card with its astronomically high spending limit through the card reader.

His outward cordiality formed an unconvincing veneer over simmering hostility and the need to make his claim on Will clear. Show off, hurt Carter with the knowledge of how much he shared with Will that outshone anything which had come before.

The man deserved to suffer, not only because of Hannibal's jealousy, but much more because he had dared to hassle Will with unwanted attentions after Will ended things. Hannibal's sadistic side could have a "field day" with an opponent so thoroughly unprepared to take him on.

"Well." Carter's mouth drooped as if he had tasted something sour. "Good luck with that." He stuffed the record into a brown paper shopping bag, his voice flat. "Because you know, Will's not a materialistic person."

"Do you consider yourself an expert on what it is that Will likes or wants?" Hannibal took the bag from Carter, a frozen, insulting smile of lethal hatred on his face.

"Sure. I know him pretty well, after all." Carter met Hannibal's eyes, stubbornly refusing to admit defeat, even now. "Still, I hope he likes the present."

"Thank you, Carter," Hannibal said smoothly, "Have a wonderful evening."

"Even though he probably already has it," Carter called after Hannibal as the doctor stalked away, murderous intent darkening further in his deceptively pretty caramel eyes.

He turned back when he had his hand on the door. “We shall see,” he replied, then stepped back out onto the sidewalk as the next ear-jarring playlist began.

***

It was no difficult task to obtain entry to Carter’s fashionably faded station wagon. Once inside, Hannibal need merely wait in the backseat for the ill-fated man to hop into this eyesore of a vehicle. Happily, the car was parked on a dark side street quite off the beaten path, between the thoroughfare of businesses and a woodsy bike path whose tall trees provided further shadowy cover.

The store closed early on Sundays, and it got dark by 5:00 at night at this time of year. Predictably, Carter walked to his car around 5:15 and climbed in without ever glancing at the backseat.

He moved to put his key in the ignition, and Hannibal had the needle sunk in his arm before the man even realized someone else was there.

***

“I hope I’m not too late,” Hannibal apologized when he arrived home two hours later. “I would understand if you had already eaten.”

Will was freshly showered, sitting in the study with the dogs laying around his chair. He set aside the book he had been reading, a collection of poems by Wislawa Szymborska.

“I waited for you, of course. Fish is in the fridge.”

He gifted Hannibal his smile of pure sunshine and came eagerly to greet him with a hug and kiss, smelling wonderfully of his nicest cologne, his hair neatly brushed back, curls nonetheless slipping loose and twisting around his face with the usual, breathtaking lushness of a handsome wood nymph.

Hannibal held Will’s face between his big hands, feeling suddenly small, eclipsed by the simple, open immensity of Will’s affection and the life they were making here together. Sometimes he still looked at Will without being quite able to convince himself the boy was real, intimidated all over again, wanting to impress him.

Now he kissed Will’s lips gently and murmured, “You were reading. Anything of interest?”

The dogs milled around their feet in the futile hope of extra treats; Will would have already fed them their dinner.

“Sit down, guys,” Will laughed.

Buster gave a single bark of complaint, but Winston whined at him to stop and Zoe led her brothers back to their cushions where the other dogs were sleeping.

Returning his attention to Hannibal, Will slid his palms up under the doctor’s light grey suit jacket, running fond fingers over the older man’s back through the fabric of his pink shirt.

Every touch from Will sent small and building shivers of delicious electricity through Hannibal that made him slightly dizzy.

The corners of Will's naturally rose-shaded, pillowy lips tweaked in a twitchy, bewildering half-smile.

"Um, yes, it was of interest."

"How so?"

Hannibal could have swooned at the cute way Will's brow furrowed as he tried to remember a sample line to illustrate why the poetry had intrigued him. They loved to talk about what they were reading, trading literary quotes like kisses.

"*'One day, perhaps some idle tongue*
mentions your name by accident:
I feel as if a rose were flung
into the room, all hue and scent.'"

"Surprisingly melancholy," Hannibal observed, running his knuckles down prickly-soft stubble, tracing his boy's exquisite jawline, then stroking the long line of Will's beautiful neck.

Will wore another henley, this one rust-colored, bringing out auburn hues in his ceaselessly pretty dark curls. His smile remained delicately hesitant.

"I can imagine," Will said softly, slipping Hannibal's jacket off and unbuttoning his waistcoat, an expert by now at undoing all of Hannibal's complicated sartorial armor.

The younger man shook his head, wrestling some unseen specter in his mind and heart. "If I ever lost you, Hannibal, if we fell apart, I can imagine how I would feel. It would be like the poem, but so much more...immense. That 'rose,' the mention of your name when you weren't mine anymore, three syllables tossed into the air, would collide into my skin like a dagger of hot ice. I couldn't *bear* it."

"You were impatient when I was a bit later than expected coming home," Hannibal surmised, submitting fluidly as Will undid his shirt buttons and pushed the garment from his shoulders, then pulled him into a smoldering kiss.

His boy's persistently obsessive need for him had Hannibal's heart galloping into the red again, pushing him past all restraint he had previously understood of how much he could care for someone, body and soul, with every breath. He kissed Will back, sliding a hand into his hair, gathering the silken brunette curls and tugging hungrily, reaching under Will's shirt to drily tweak his pretty nipples, knowing how Will loved the brisk pain of teasing roughness.

"I wanted you to come *home* to me," Will said tightly between kisses and moans, groping Hannibal's pectorals, dragging his nails through the older man's chest hair, enough to leave scarlet scratch marks, staking his claim.

Hannibal let out a pleasured hiss at the sweet little slice of pain, and only kissed back harder, pulled his boy's hair again just the way Will liked, consuming his mouth with feverish, demanding pressure. He pulled at Will's lower lip with his sharp fangs, then licked the line of the bite mark still marring Will's lovely pink flesh from the other night.

After a savoring suck and another teeth clashing kiss, he breathed hard against Will's irresistible lips, "I belong here, home with you."

Hannibal lifted Will's shirt over his head as the younger man raised his arms to accommodate him, trembling with lustful frustration. His overkissed lips wobbled as his eyes glazed with barely held-back tears, stormy oceans blazing. All because Hannibal had come home later than planned. What a dear, terribly needy boy loved him, Hannibal thought. How unbelievably lucky he was, to be the center of Will's perilous universe as they controlled each others' gravity.

The doctor leaned down to press a kiss to the scar on Will's shoulder, wishing he had made it, or better still, that one day he could cover it with a new scar, reversing the damage with joy.

"My baby. *My* Will, my infinitely good boy. I'll always come back." Hannibal smiled, the way he did when he was prefacing one of his many special treats for Will.

Will recognized his look and giggled when Hannibal swept him off his feet and carried him away.

He smirked when Hannibal only went so far as the dining room, then sat him on the table, eagerly kissing his neck and unbuttoning his pants.

Will's eyes rolled back at the sloppy, fervent, wet glide of Hannibal's mouth and clever tongue on his sensitive neck, his teeth teasing him with a long graze before nipping and licking again.

"Mmm," Will sighed, "I thought we would go to the bedroom?"

Hannibal was delighted to have changed Will's insecure misgivings to tender amusement. "That was my initial plan, but then I found I simply didn't have the patience. This is closer."

Will gasped as Hannibal pushed him back so he lay on the table, then peeled his pants down and tossed them aside. Once again they had left a littered path of clothing all over the house.

"And I'm in the mood for an appetizer," Hannibal added, his accent thick and husky.

Soon Will's legs were over Hannibal's shoulders, his weeping cock deep in the doctor's throat, Hannibal stroking his perineum *just so*, then lightly squeezing his balls, loudly slurping and drooling all over Will's rock-hard erection, dedicated to his pleasure to the exclusion of all else, messy and shameless.

Will came with a shaking spasm and a high-pitched cry, the salty musk of his cum coating Hannibal's tongue as the older man went on stroking and sucking him into overstimulation.

“Fuck, fuck, *fuck*--!” Will’s back arched off the table; his feet dug into Hannibal’s shoulders and back. “You have to stop, don’t stop, don’t-- Jesus Christ--”

Hannibal’s excessive attentions had brought Will a few stolen, extra waves of unbearable bliss. He slammed his hand down on the table, threw his head back and struggled to regain his breath, soon collapsing on Hannibal’s fancy dinner table with a lust-drunk grin.

“Every time I think you’ve outdone yourself definitively…” Will panted, trying to lift himself on elbows and failing pathetically. “*God,* who are you?”

Hannibal gathered him into a sweet hug, kissed his head and rubbed his back, instinctively adding the right amount of extra pressure to ease the tension that always gathered in Will’s shoulder around the old injury.

“Whatever else I am,” he murmured devotedly, “I am entirely yours. I wanted you to feel it.”

“Okay, I…*wow*, I get the point, Hannibal.” Will drew back from his favorite snuggling spot against his lover’s chest, enough to get a good look at the doctor’s face.

He caressed Hannibal’s strongly defined cheekbones and let his lover’s amber gaze wash over him like a wave.

“Thank you.”

It was a complicated ‘thank you’ that needed no elaboration. They both understood Hannibal had satiated Will’s need to be needed. And Hannibal was never frustrated but always elated that it must be done so very often.

“Thank you for all that you are, my dear.”

He helped Will down from the table and added playfully, “And you must know that as usual, one reason for my lateness is that I have been buying you gifts.”

Will blushed and grinned, a vision with his well-fitting blue jeans now pulled up around his waist. He had left the fly undone so that Hannibal could still admire his slender hips and lovely firm stomach, even the subtle line of dark hair disappearing into the open jeans, making the older man’s mouth water as only Will could.

“Spoiling me again, Daddy? After you just made me come so hard my vision blurred?”

“Spoiling you is Daddy’s very favorite thing of all, my beautiful boy.”

He patted Will’s cheek, glancing again at the younger man’s distracting naked chest and arms, wanting to wait a while before pouncing again, let his own arousal build to a breaking point that ensured Will was fucked as hard as he truly deserved.

“Shall I go and get your presents?”

“Yes, please,” said Will, and soon he was back in the study being showered with yet another over-the-top series of gifts, although it was nowhere near his birthday and Christmas was still

a month away.

Hannibal could only guess how overly indulgent he would be with his sweet Will on actual holidays, but for tonight he would gladly settle for the four flat gift boxes wrapped in silver and blue bows from the finest men's clothing stores, the dog-patterned gift bag and smaller jewelry box, two big bags from Sephora, and the Elliott Smith record which he had wrapped carefully in black tissue paper at his cliffside house while Carter groaned weakly with pain in the corner of the kitchen.

"Daddy," Will smiled, still blushing bright red at the extremes of spoiling to which Hannibal had already become accustomed. "How much did you spend on me today? After all that stuff you got me yesterday and the big fancy dinner at that expensive sushi restaurant…"

Hannibal's face was so full of joy, anyone would have thought he was the one being pampered with gifts. "Which one do you want to open first?"

He sat on the floor next to Will, their backs resting comfortably against the bottom of the couch, their feet casually overlapping, the dogs dozing across the room as lazy flames crackled in the fireplace. A short glass of whiskey sat on the floor beside each man as another before-dinner aperitif.

Will bit his lip and reached for the jewelry box. He undid the velvet ribbon and lifted the lid to find a bracelet of beautiful black braided leather. A 24 karat gold charm hung from the bracelet, personalized with words engraved in black to match the leather bands.

"Oh, Hannibal," Will sighed, immediately recognizing the words.

It was a line from their favorite poem by e.e. cummings, "[i carry your heart with me](i carry it in)": "*(for you are my fate, my sweet)*"

"Let's see how it looks," Hannibal said with quiet excitement. He fastened the bracelet around Will's wrist, beaming. "How lovely."

"*I fear no fate,*" Will murmured, thoughtful, touching the bracelet dreamily. "*For you are my fate.*"

"*My sweet,*" Hannibal finished the line, pressing a gentle kiss to Will's brow and smelling his hair, his skin, the lingering scent of himself all over Will.

"Now everyone will know I'm yours," Will said shyly, still stroking the delicate leather bands and marveling at the shining gold charm. "Everyone who can't see me naked, anyway."

They both chuckled. Beneath his collar line, Will's whole body was covered in bruises of various shades as a result of Hannibal's near-constant sucking and biting, while Hannibal's own body bore matching love wounds.

"Any road I take will always lead me back to you, my darling," Hannibal assured him.

"And I'll always keep a light on for you," Will said, nibbling his lip again where Hannibal had sucked and bitten it. He had his eyes cast down on his wrist, safely admiring the bracelet,

but he brought them up to Hannibal again now, beseeching blue. “I’ll always wait up for you.”

Touched, Hannibal squeezed his hand. “Won’t you open another?”

Will took his time enjoying the reveal of every extravagant item, from the tailored shirts with his initials stitched into them, to the chubby corgi plushy which he immediately hugged to his chest with a bright laugh, and the elegant set of shower gel, aftershave and lotion from Sephora.

“Dior Sauvage?” He read on the grey and black shower gel bottle, his eyebrows lifting saucily.

“The perfect choice for my wicked little savage,” Hannibal teased.

Intrigued by the shape of the gift, Will had saved the record for last, and unwrapped it with a huge smile.

“My favorite. Let’s listen to it right now.”

“In that case,” Hannibal replied smoothly, standing and reaching a hand down to help Will up. “I request the honor of your hand for a dance.”

“Then I’m all yours,” Will agreed, softly elated.

He placed the record on Hannibal’s old-fashioned, mahogany record player. A sentimental slow song began, the words warmly embracing, as they danced wrapped around each other, naked chests pressing close, hearts thrumming with a duet of happiness.

“*I’m in love with the world, through the eyes of a girl / who’s still around the morning after.*”

Will nuzzled into Hannibal’s neck and sighed. And Hannibal thought about all the years during which he had seldom been “around the morning after” for anyone, simply didn’t care who he hurt, because he himself was never hurt. Now Will was all of his morning afters, his sunlight and joy, the only vision he wanted waiting in his bed each day.

When the song ended, they were going to head to the kitchen to finally make dinner, but Will’s phone vibrated.

Hannibal’s heart leapt into his throat. Was this the news about Carter’s disappearance? Who would have noticed so soon, or saw fit to tell Will? His paranoias about carrying off his plan perfectly were threatening to run away with him, so he forced his mind back to reason.

“It’s my parents,” Will told him, shrugging, oblivious to Hannibal’s inner tumult.

“Hi, Dad. What’s up?”

A pause.

“Huh, tonight?” Will yawned, reached for Hannibal’s wrist and checked his watch, which was all the doctor was currently wearing, except for his suit pants. “I don’t know, we were planning to stay in. *What*? Don’t you pull the ‘which of us is a senior citizen’ routine with me. You’re barely old enough to order off the senior menu.”

Will listened as his father elaborated on whatever invitation had been offered. “Well, you’re right, it’s not *that* late. Hang on, I’ll ask Hannibal.”

Rolling his eyes with good-natured affection, Will asked under his breath, “Do you want to go to Becky’s Tavern for karaoke with my parents? We can always freeze the fish, they have good food at Becky’s. But it’s okay if you don’t wanna--”

“I would love to go.” Hannibal raked his eyes over Will, enamored with his naked torso, his firm pectorals and powerful biceps, the ever-so-kissable softness in his belly.

Hannibal had to change modes rather quickly, from paranoid curiosity to domestic sweetness, but he was nothing if not adaptable, especially where Will was concerned.

“Really?” Will asked, “I mean, some of the singing is pretty awful.”

Travis Graham’s voice could be heard on the phone, replying, “I heard that, Will.”

Hannibal chuckled and took the phone. “What time should we be there, Mr. Graham?”

Chapter End Notes

The e.e. cummings poem: https://eecummings.quillsliteracy.org/i-carry-your-heart-344/

And the one by Wislawa Szymborska: https://poets.org/poem/nothing-twice

There's a brief allusion to my poor, sweet Ser Jorah from *Game of Thrones* and his line to Dany, "There are times when I look at you and I still can't believe you're real." ❤️

So the "Hannibal out of his comfort zone" bit is actually coming in the next chapter, basically because I got carried away in Hannibal feels and spiraled into fluff-mania again, then ran out of room in this chapter! Hannigram are going to karaoke next!

Thanks for reading as always! 💕

You could hide beside me

Chapter Notes

Welcome back to my escape into Hannigram fluff and feels! This is a long chapter, hope you enjoy. 🖤

Playlist updated for karaoke night:
https://open.spotify.com/playlist/4WeoEljZNjydQouKxoEISf?si=bd4e3b0ecca540da

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Unlike the cavernous, peanut-shell scattered realm of Wes' Ribhouse, Becky's Tavern turned out to be rather a cozy and comparatively intimate place. The small bar was gleamingly clean, well-stocked with quality liquors, and given the dim lighting, the votive candles on each table added a nice bit of ambiance. Hannibal could even forgive the football game playing on mute over two screens somewhat crammed on either side of the bar.

However, the smaller space allowed for excellent acoustics, and there was no escape from the vocal gymnastics with which Hannibal and Will were confronted immediately upon entry. Murderous ideas began floating into Hannibal's mind as he smiled pleasantly and bore with the earnest, leather-vested, 60-something man with a long beard who was belting out "Every Rose Has its Thorn."

It was a wonder the large "Guinness" mirror behind the bar did not shatter, nor Hannibal's eardrums. After his recent visit to Train Stop Records, he considered himself worthy of some sort of award for enduring loudly irritating music, but had no intention of complaining to Will.

"Sorry," Will winced, slipping his arm comfortably through Hannibal's, blushing slightly in anticipation of Hannibal's reaction to the vocal histrionics of the man soon named by the MC as "The Legendary Ray."

"What he lacks in tuneful delivery, he makes up for with enthusiasm," Hannibal answered, brushing a warm kiss to Will's cutely flushed cheek. He squeezed Will's arm, rubbing his thumb right over the firmest bulge of muscle that had him continually obsessed, and smiled.

He wished he could find the words to tell Will how much it meant just to be here on a casual night out, meeting his parents, part of the family almost! Doing "couple things." Far from annoyed at the "cheesy" scenario, he was almost dreadfully pleased.

"Boys, you're here," Maddie Graham greeted them, rising from a nearby table and coming forward to give both men a warm hug.

She looked quite festive in white trousers and a coral blouse with a matching sweater wrapped around her shoulders, strands of lightly grey-strewn brown hair escaping a loose bun to frame her face, microphone earrings dangling as she grinned.

Travis approached, looking especially like an older version of Will in a plaid shirt under a tweed blazer with elbow patches and jeans, the Graham men's version of dressing up. The silver in his auburn hair continued into his beard, and his smile made something in Hannibal's soul clutch, not for Travis, but the way it was almost exactly *Will's* smile, carrying a meaning which the cannibal's formerly cynical self never could have anticipated. Quickly, he discerned what he had not contemplated before, that he was actually closer in age to Travis than to Will. There was a naughty thrill in that, a reminder of the age difference between himself and Will, the sexual play it inspired, but the moment held further, deeper truths.

Hannibal's head spun a little; he had not yet gotten used to the strong resemblances between Will and his parents, wasn't used to thoughts like *look how gorgeously they are aging. He will always be beautiful, not that I ever doubted it*, ideas of growing old with someone, forever lovers, besotted to the end and beyond.

And Hannibal realized that Will grew up dressing just like his father, jeans, plaid, tweed, boots; it was only when Will met *him* that he started dressing up more, buying a new suit for the opera and a finer cologne, knowing just how to bait his lure. It flattered, enticed and enamored him to know Will found him worth such efforts of careful, calculated courtship.

He felt his cheeks glowing and hurting from the genuine smile that ached in his soul, looking from Will to his parents and back again while they all chatted fondly, and yet another regrettable performance echoed from the stage to fill the room with wretched cacophony, and he belonged, he was part of it, the humor and fun, the simple recreation, down to earth, the secrets shimmering between himself and Will, all of it somehow perfect. He was expected to be right by Will's side, welcomed into the fold.

"Mrs. Graham," Hannibal smiled, maintaining his formality no matter how many times he was bade call Will's parents by their first names.

He preferred the courtly, gentlemanly habit, and noticed it impressed the Grahams -- Maddie overtly, Travis with the usual cheerful begrudging manner he probably directed at anyone dating his son.

He would show them through his flawless manners and attentive behavior with Will, that he was the last one their son would be dating. He was *the one,* and someday he knew he would earn Travis' trust.

"Don't listen to anything Maddie says," Travis advised by way of greeting. "She's had a white wine spritzer, all bets are off."

He gave Will a quick hug and shook Hannibal's hand, then Maddie faux-slapped her husband upside the head.

“Hush, you. I’m not that much of a lightweight,” she insisted as they walked over to the table where the Grahams had settled for the evening.

They had to speak a little more loudly to be heard over the following performance. The chipper MC, Earl, was a portly bald man wearing an Earth, Wind and Fire t-shirt. He introduced the next singer as “The Lovely Kate,” a tall, red-haired young woman dressed all in black whose intentions seemed as sincere as The Legendary Ray.

Kate launched into a song with which Hannibal was unfamiliar. It seemed to make her quite irate as she soon screeched, *“I am here! To remind you! Of the mess you left when you went away!”*

Hannibal blinked and looked back and forth between his companions with bewilderment.

“Aww, she’s back to Alanis,” Maddie almost shouted to be audible above the din and other patrons yelling, “*You tell ‘em, honey!”*

“Guess it didn’t work out with that Sam fella,” Travis noted, shaking his head and taking a sip of his drink. “You know, I thought his performance on ‘You’re the One that I Want’ from *Grease* was downright subpar. Kate carried that whole thing.”

“She’s better off, then,” Will chortled, plucking a laminated menu from the ketchup-mustard stand on the table and placing it between himself and Hannibal.

Hannibal loved the way Will used the excuse of perusing the menu together to lean so close, beguiling him with the scent of his latest new cologne, dewy citrus and pepper, and another note to the smell, that something underneath that was only Will: sweet Southern heat, rough and tumble danger.

As soon as he’d placed his coat over the back of his chair, Will had rolled up the sleeves of his new white button-up shirt, showing off strong forearms, beautiful hands and wrists that always had Hannibal mesmerized with their easy, quick power. Now that overflow of distracting male beauty was set off by the bracelet around Will’s wrist. He was showing that off too, drawing Hannibal in even further at the same time he let everyone, including his parents, know how close they were getting.

Will was dressed up just the way Hannibal liked him, and while he often jokingly pretended not to approve of his boy’s faded blue jeans, there was something about the way they hung on Will’s frame and hugged his ass that made the casual attire surprisingly delightful. And Will was so relaxed and natural here, none of the exhausted superiority of his work life, the stressed attempt to fit in which Hannibal had seen from him at the opera.

Someday, he wanted to take Will back to his own world again and treat him so much better, the way he deserved, confidently let everyone know this stunning creature belonged to him. His heart held no further pride or hesitation; only a continually unfurling urge to bring Will joy, and his own joy wrapped inextricably in the process.

“Everything here is good, basically,” Will noted, thumb planted to his lower lip, absent-mindedly stroking the small scrape left behind by Hannibal’s teeth.

His other hand was on Hannibal's knee, massaging him, warm tingles spreading from the small point of contact and sending an automatic cascade of butterflies through Hannibal's stomach. Will Graham was the effortless conductor of the opera that was Hannibal's nervousness.

"I believe you." Hannibal's unusually short statement, especially considering that Kate's performance had ended and there was again a lull in the noise level, caught Will's attention.

The younger man smiled thoughtfully at Hannibal's lovestruck stare and planted a kiss to his cheek.

"Daddy, you're so cute. Wanting me, huh?" He whispered in Hannibal's ear, that dominating rumble coming back into his tone.

Hannibal shivered, embarrassed but desperately excited to be feeling this particular way in public. It threw him for a loop, the seamless manner in which the tables turned in their dynamic, the fluidity of their roles, how easy it was for him to go from stern dom to begging sub for Will, and vice versa.

"Yes," he muttered, touching Will's hand where it lay on his knee, longing to move it further up, but knowing they actually had to break apart fairly soon; they were not only in public, but Will's parents were sitting right across from them.

At present, Maddie and Travis were flipping through the big book of karaoke song choices, but Will and Hannibal couldn't carry on in this saucy way much longer before they noticed. They could steal a few more seconds of quiet raunchy heat, however, so they did.

"When we get home," Will purred, sliding his index finger down the curve of Hannibal's thigh. The older man had melted to his lover's wishes and recently purchased a few items of more casual attire for outings such as this; therefore Hannibal wore a pair of fitted dark wash jeans, and the scratchy-tight fabric combined with the feeling of Will's firm, commanding touch and its too-tentative nature to draw a soft, needy moan he half-smothered, his light lashes fluttering.

"When we get home, Daddy. I'll give you what you're needing." Will squeezed his knee again and leaned into his other ear. "I wanna lick you, bite you right now so bad, all over. I know how you'd like it if I took you right here in front of everyone while you moaned and begged me to fuck you harder. Huh? If my parents weren't here, mmm?"

"Yes, baby." Hannibal's heart hammered and his stomach somersaulted. Sweat broke out on his forehead and the back of his neck, small pinpricks of agonized desire darting down his spine, lightening in his blood. The feeling had one name. *Will.* "Yes."

"Hmm. Oh, yes. Damn right." Will leaned back, glanced over to where Maddie and Travis were still debating the virtues of Sonny and Cher vs Donnie and Marie. Then he tugged Hannibal's light beige cotton raglan sweater and added, "I'm gonna call you 'honey' when we're in public. And I like that because it suits you, you're always so damn sweet to me. But you know what I really mean, too, right?"

Hannibal nodded, his eyes big and gleaming amber in the candlelit softness of the tavern. Will was sitting so close their knees touched, and it seemed they were alone for a second.

“I’m going to the bar,” Will said more loudly. “Waitress probably won’t be over for dinner orders for a while, it’s so crowded. Mom, Dad, you need anything?”

“White wine spritzer,” Maddie chirped, still perusing the songbook, Travis’ arm around her shoulder.

“Hmm?” Travis looked up distractedly, not responding to the way Will and Hannibal were both flushed with barely smothered desire. Hannibal was slightly amused and deeply pleased to think others were getting used to how overtly in love he and Will were. Travis’ only reaction was to add, “Oh, sure, I’ll have another Seven and Seven.”

Will stood with his eyebrows raised, lashing a roguish smirk down at Hannibal. “You want something, honey?”

Honey meant “Daddy.” Hannibal licked his lips and let out a husky chuckle.

“Yes, please, a glass of cabernet sauvignon, please.”

A pretty thirty-something woman with intricately braided hair and pink-framed glasses had taken to the stage to sing a sweet ballad, so Will had the padding of background noise again when he leaned down and murmured to Hannibal, “You said please twice. Don’t worry, you’ll be saying it a lot more later.”

With another knowing smile, Will sauntered off to the bar, swinging his hips a bit, showing off his strong back and tight but round little ass in those damn snug faded jeans. Hannibal wanted Will to tear him to pieces.

“So,” Maddie piped up, “That’s a beautiful bracelet Will has on. A gift from you?”

“Yes,” Hannibal said almost shyly. He felt a bit anxious again for Will’s parents’ approval and fidgeted, playing with a napkin on the table, shifting it in a circle. “Thank you.”

“No occasion?” Travis questioned with an unreadable look.

“Only my astronomically high regard,” Hannibal explained. He fell unintentionally into a complete honesty that left him feeling exposed. “I want to make your son as happy as possible, every single day. He deserves it.”

“Humph,” Travis marveled. He sat back and glanced at his wife, who looked delighted at Hannibal’s professions. “I guess you really are on the level, Dr Hannibal Lecter. Next thing you know, I might actually have to approve of you dating my son.”

Maddie laughed and swatted his arm. “You old phony. He actually thinks you’re wonderful, Hannibal, really. He even said he thinks you’re the first person Will ever ‘brought home,’ so to speak, who seemed remotely worthy.”

“Did you have to tell him that?” Travis complained, but he couldn’t hide his smile. “Okay, maybe so, but just don’t go gettin’ any high-flung ideas and slackin’ off in the way you treat Will. We’re awful picky about who is good enough for him, you know. He plays it off like he doesn’t care, but he’s been so disappointed in the past whenever he dated.”

“Really?” Hannibal asked, leaning in across the table.

Luckily, and rather hilariously, it seemed that Maddie was not the lightweight of the family after all, but actually Travis, with a few drinks, could be relied upon to begin waxing nostalgic and sentimental with no restraint. Travis’ normal attitude of amused, jaded sarcasm melted into pure love for his family that he could go on and on about.

“Yeah, don’t you think, Maddie? He always was a romantic, but so cautious about it, sensitive. Didn’t wanna get hurt,” Travis recalled.

“Oh, sweetie, yeah,” Maddie sighed, patting Travis's hand and confiding to Hannibal. “There was that whole thing at senior prom…”

Senior Prom. Immediately, Hannibal pictured a seventeen or eighteen year old Will, lithe and pretty, dressed to the nines in his first tux, pinning a flower to his lapel, excited for a night out with whomever he had chosen to be his lucky date. How nervous and elated he would have been. Hannibal felt unreasonably jealous of whoever got to be on Will’s arm that night in the sticky Louisiana heat, riding in a rented limo and dancing the night away in a function hall decorated in some theme appropriate to the mid-1990’s, what would it have been? Hannibal did not know enough about the pop culture trends that must have defined Will’s youth…

“It was the silliest prom theme, Jurassic Park,” Maddie laughed, “But Will was so damn excited. He was on the prom committee, and actually they made the place gorgeous, like an enchanted jungle, vines and fairy lights everywhere, adorable themed snacks and green punch. Will was so proud. And he had asked this girl, Viola Chisholm, who said yes. He had a crush on this girl for two whole years but she was always with that real popular boy, what was his name, Travis?”

“Kyle Bartlett,” Travis recalled, looking annoyed. “Well, wouldn’t you know, Dr. Lecter, on prom night Viola called Will to say she changed her mind, got back together with Kyle, and wasn’t gonna go to the dance with him after all.”

“He was so crestfallen, he didn’t even go to the prom after all that work he put in,” Maddie sighed. “But he wouldn’t ever talk about it with us. I don’t know, ever since then he’s been kind of cynical about love. Maybe it seems strange to let something affect you that much when you’re only a teenager...maybe we dote on Will a little too much because he’s an only child, but I always felt real bad about it.”

Hannibal was seized with an impossibly deep desire to take hold of time itself and go back to that night, go to Will and give him the romantic night he had been denied by this thoroughly despicable “Viola,” make it all better.

Onstage, the woman in glasses was belting out a poignant, soft ballad with the first genuinely decent performance of the night. She had a gentle, crystalline tone as her voice caressed the

romantic, yearning lyrics over an acoustic track.

"*I've got a crush on you...I hope you feel the way that I do...I get a rush when I'm with you...ohhh, I've got a crush on you, a crush on you…"*

Hannibal swallowed and looked from Will's parents to the bar, where Will was politely placing his order, leaning slightly across the counter so that the bartender could hear him. *My good boy.* He was heartbreakingly beautiful, with his stubbled profile, the lines of his slender-strong body, the movement of his plush lips and long neck. The words of the song seemed, in all their adolescent intensity, to be derived from Hannibal's own feelings.

"It isn't strange at all," Hannibal replied belatedly. "And I'm glad you confided in me about this, Mr. and Mrs. Graham. Some of the sadness I suffered in youth has marked me as well, and I understand how profound that can be."

"Oh, Hannibal," Maddie said, sad and sympathetic. "Will told us about...well, we're so sorry for what happened when you were a boy. And we don't mean to compare that with…"

Travis seemed momentarily lost for words except to nod and add, "Honestly, son, there aren't words for what you went through, but we're so sorry."

Mischa. The terrible men taking away young Hannibal's only delicate happiness.

In the here and now, Hannibal nodded, feeling strong enough somehow to metabolize all of this grief commingled in present happiness. Feeling like a survivor, who had fallen in love with another survivor. Knowing there were much darker, more devastating incidents from Will's teen years and beyond, of which his parents knew nothing. The flash of Will's teeth in the dark, the surprise grip of his strong hands and the tip of his blade. Stories Hannibal still longed to know, but now he thought of how that darkness balanced and somehow matched Will's heartfelt romantic yearning. They really were two of a kind.

"Thank you, truly," Hannibal smiled, reassuring the Grahams. "I understand you perfectly. And now, I think I should go and help Will with those drinks."

Will's parents looked relieved that their son's partner understood the condolences they wanted to express for his loss. Hannibal navigated the crowded tavern with sinuous ease, winding between tables to arrive at the bar, where he took two of the drinks from Will so his lover could carry the other glasses.

"You're here," Will said softly, and they knew he meant that Hannibal really had understood he didn't like to be without him for too long in a crowded setting. The feeling was completely mutual.

Hannibal's voice was throaty, rich with reciprocated need. "Always, mylimasis."

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The menu had similar fare to Wes', old-fashioned comfort food with an emphasis on barbecue sauce and "slow-roasting." Hannibal was about to ask that Will order for him again,

not least of all because this evening he was feeling at least as submissive as he was protective of his lover. But before he could voice the request, Travis dared Hannibal to eat barbecue ribs with his hands this time.

“C’mon, you can do it!” Travis laughed.

“You’re such a toddler,” Maddie put in, “Order whatever you want, Hannibal, don’t listen to him.”

“Agreed,” Will added, that possessive hand flying back to Hannibal’s denim-clad knee. “You don’t have to listen to his dares, honey. Look, they have lamb kabobs with white bean hummus and chimichurri, that sounds good.”

“It does indeed.” Hannibal sat back with a smug smile, meeting Travis’ challenging smirk. “Perhaps you should have the lamb, my dear, and save a bite for me. I’ll be feasting on the half-slab of ribs in Becky’s own signature sauce. No silverware needed.”

“This’ll be good,” Travis hooted, slapping his knee as Maddie flicked a cherry stem at him.

His dare, however perilous to Hannibal’s overall aesthetic, was far from offensive to the doctor. Hannibal saw through the joking challenge to the man’s genuine regard and continued attempt to include him in the night’s rituals, even creating new ones and funny stories to retell in the future. Again, Hannibal felt like family for the first time in many years.

Then the MC called out, “I’m looking for everyone’s favorite couple, the incomparable Maddie and Travis!”

And Will’s parents took to the stage, launching into a syrupy ballad from the ‘80s, their wedding song.

“*After all the starts and stops / we keep coming back to these two hearts / two angels who’ve been rescued from the fall…*”

“They are quite gifted vocally,” Hannibal noted, sipping his wine and kneading Will’s hand on the table, easing the tension from Will’s various hands-on occupations.

Between typing, writing case and lecture notes, wielding his gun on duty, fishing, tinkering with boats and...the other proclivities they had yet to discuss, it was little wonder his dear boy’s hands were often a bit achy. Hannibal knew Will never had someone before who had his body memorized, every sensitive spot, every twinge of quirky pain. He gloried in being the one to show Will, finally, definitively, how deeply he could be loved, treasured and spoiled.

“Yeah, a couple of songbirds,” Will chuckled, taking a sip of his own drink, a whiskey on the rocks.

At the bar, Hannibal had insisted on picking up the check for the whole night of food and drink, and Will had whispered another mischievous promise to “fuck his brains out” later.

“Did you inherit the talent?” Hannibal inquired, feeling playful.

“Oh, me? You’ve heard me sing, I definitely did *not* inherit the talent from Kenny and Dolly up there.” Will gestured at his parents as his cheeks turned pink.

“I beg to differ. From the first time I heard you singing, I thought I could listen to you all night. Won’t you sing something for me again?”

Will grinned and grabbed the songbook, flipping through it gamely. “Anything for you, *honey.*” He winked, dragging his long, pretty finger down the list of available tracks. “It won’t be the first time I’ve slung back a couple of whiskeys and tortured this place with my so-called ‘singing.’”

But when Will was onstage, soulfully performing a ‘90s rock ballad, batting his eyelashes at Hannibal and clearly singing to him alone, the older man locked eyes with him, enraptured. Will had chosen a song that seemed to describe the listless, lost sadness of his youth, never finding a peer who could return his wild fits of violent passion. He also seemed to be telling Hannibal what the doctor had told Will first: he could confess everything and be accepted. He could be Seen, and loved.

“*Grew up way too fast and now there’s nothing to believe / reruns all become our history / a tired song keeps playing on a tired radio / and I won’t tell no one your name.*.”

If Hannibal told Will he was the Ripper, Will would tell no one this deeper identity, his true Name. What he did and how he felt no remorse, it would be more than forgiven or embraced: Will would worship at the altar of all Hannibal was in his most destructive moments. Hannibal had never felt so sure of acceptance, nor so smitten. He loved the sound of Will’s voice, not perfectly in tune, but deep, manly, sultry, a voice he wanted in his ear all night pouring wicked obscenities and sweet words of adoration.

Hannibal realized he was never stronger than when he was weak for Will. And it would not be much longer now before Will knew it all. He had so wanted to take his time drawing out Carter's demise, yet his bitter jealousy had mastered him, causing a much swifter end to his would-be rival's suffering than the vile man deserved. Still, the kill had been vastly satisfying, and the sooner Will heard about it, saw it for himself, the better.

“Now see, I always thought Will had a nice tone to his voice,” Maddie reflected, and Travis nodded.

“He never wanted to join band or chorus in school, but he woulda been good.”

“I thoroughly agree. It’s a delightful treat to listen to Will sing.” Hannibal sighed, never feeling more easy agreement.

“Know what you look like?” Maddie asked, stirring her drink while contemplating Hannibal’s expression. “Mr. Darcy. Mmmhmm, Mr. Darcy, in *Pride and Prejudice*.”

“Oh, not this again,” Travis sighed. “Here she goes. Hannibal, the number of times I’ve had to sit through that six hour movie with Colin what’s-his-face jumping in the damn lake…”

Ah. Travis had finally called him ‘Hannibal,’ rather than Dr. Lecter. Hannibal was sure he was only a few steps away from son-in-law status.

“Colin *Firth,*” Maddie corrected him, rolling her eyes. “And he’s full of it, as always. Travis cries his eyes out when Mr. Darcy proposes again at the end of the movie. Anyway, Hannibal, a cultured man like you has likely read Jane Austen.”

“Of course,” Hannibal confirmed. He smiled, thinking it would be a good idea to reread Miss Austen’s works soon. After all, he could use all the insight into tender courtship which he could gather. “In what specific way does my conduct call Mr. Darcy to mind, Mrs. Graham?”

“It’s when Elizabeth plays upon the pianoforte,” Maddie explained. “And she’s just *okay* at it really, kind of proficient and awful cute, but nothing special. But Mr. Darcy is so completely in love with her that he just stares and never wants her to stop playing. He just wants to look at her, you know? That’s you, with Will.”

Hannibal blushed, feeling rather “called out.” He ducked his face and cleared his throat. Mrs. Graham had him dead to rights.

“Hey,” Will said, brushing his hand over Hannibal’s shoulder and sinking back into the chair beside him. “How did I do?”

“It was so lovely,” Hannibal praised.

“Aww, thank you, honey. Oh, look, dinner’s here, finally. I’m starved,” Will sighed, patting his stomach.

Ah. Hannibal had very nearly forgotten about the upcoming ordeal of consuming barbecue ribs sans knife and fork. He must indeed lift, with his bare hands, these slippery pieces of meat coated in dark reddish-brown sauce. The food was fragrant with tangy, spicy-sweet flavor and did look delicious, but the manner of consuming it was...uncouth.

“Here you go, love.” Will smiled so sweetly and tied a plastic bib around Hannibal’s neck.

The Chesapeake Ripper looked down at the bib with its bright red slogan, “I <3 BBQ” and heaved a sigh fit for a true martyr to his cause.

“Very well,” Hannibal conceded, picking up the meat as Will smiled over at him in solidarity. He took a small bite of the ribs, making each confrontation with the messy meat as brief and precise as possible, but his face and hands were soon covered in sauce anyway and he felt utterly ridiculous.

“I simply wish to know,” he added primly, employing the welcome assortment of “wet wipes” to cleanse his sauce-dripping face and hands while Will watched with great interest. “What reward have I earned for embarking upon this culinary adventure?”

He took a long sip of his wine, draining the glass, and Travis laughed, “I gotta hand it to you, Hannibal, you’re up for anything. I admire that about you.”

Hannibal gave a small, gentlemanly bow. “Thank you, Mr. Graham.”

Will couldn't seem to peel his eyes off of Hannibal, who still sat proper and elegant as ever, but with the plastic bib over his shirt and a tiny blot of barbecue sauce at the corner of his mouth. The younger man reached over and wiped the sauce off with his thumb, then kissed Hannibal, the contact delicious and too brief but somehow absolutely perfect. Will's cobalt eyes sparkled.

"I think he should get to choose his own karaoke song," Maddie declared. "After that. I mean, he ate every bite of those ribs without even reaching for the fork."

"My own...song?" Hannibal removed the bib and looked at Will with an "S.O.S." expression.

Eating inelegant food with his bare hands was one thing, but singing onstage? Hannibal did not much like to speak of it, but he had not been blessed in the area of song, and aside from the occasional shower performance, never sang.

"It's the karokey," Maddie encouraged, "You oughta give it a whirl, Hannibal! It's fun, no one judges. It's just a way to let go and enjoy yourself."

Hannibal shrugged. "Very well, then. What do you recommend?"

It really could not be much worse than covering his skin with Becky's own signature sauce, and that he had rather enjoyed in the end. He felt triumphant and ready to take on another herculean task in this gambit of impressing Will's parents.

"I see your challenge, Dad, and raise you this," Will said, reaching for the binder of songs. He handed the book to his father with a confident smirk. "You pick the song. We'll perform a duet. Knock all y'all's socks off, right honey?"

Hannibal felt he would dissolve into lustful worship. With a couple of drinks and enough time relaxing around his family, Will's Southern accent had completely taken over his voice, and he had said "y'all" for the first time in Hannibal's presence. That his reaction to this should be feverish lust no longer could surprise Hannibal. He just wanted Will to keep talking.

"Of course," He said, feeling more certain, gazing at his lover. They were a team, after all. "Of course we will."

***

With a somewhat evil grin, Travis had selected the song and neatly written Will and Hannibal's names on the paper announcing their intention to perform, and walked the request up to the stage with great enthusiasm.

Soon, Earl the MC was beckoning "The Talented Hannibal and Will" up to the stage. Will's heart beat faster as he took Hannibal's hand and led him to the small platform that served as a performing space.

The sophisticated doctor stared out at the tables of happy karaoke fans looking up at them. He blinked at all the faces that seemed to swim in a sea of bright lights from the cheesy

multicolored system Earl brought with him to all his gigs. Hannibal swallowed nervously.

Will knew Hannibal probably felt more like turning and running than submitting to this experience, but he wanted his lover to have fun and let loose. This was *such* a couple's thing for them to be doing, despite its obvious silliness, Will was on cloud nine. He could tell his parents were getting to love Hannibal almost as much as he did and welcome him into the family. One of these days, he was going to put a ring on Hannibal's finger and his parents would cry like babies through the whole wedding, then both accuse the other of weeping while pretending they had remained magically aloof. Will could hardly wait.

"Hey, it's just silly," Will reassured Hannibal, slinging an arm around his waist and giving him a side-hug, bumping their hips. "It's just fun. Let go a little with me."

Hannibal rolled his shoulders back and cleared his throat, appreciative of Will's encouragement, but still looking tense. "Very well, my dear, I will do my utmost. However, I warn you that Earl may soon recant his moniker of 'The Talented Hannibal.' Talented I may be--"

"Very," Will grinned.

"Very," Hannibal repeated with a bit of his egotistical vigor returning, so fucking adorable to Will, so precious. "But my talents do not lie in the area of--"

A bubblegum pop song with extra sugar began booming from the speakers behind them, and Hannibal froze in terror while Will laughed so hard tears streamed from his eyes. "My dad is such a bastard! Britney Spears! Okay, well, we're gonna sing the hell out of this, then, come on."

"*You tell me you're in love with me,*" Will sang, barely looking at the monitor. This song had been played a zillion times when it came out, and he had always sort of had a soft spot for a well-executed pop song, although rarely admitting it. "*Like you can't take your pretty eyes away from me…"*

Hannibal's eyes really *were* so pretty, especially as he squinted at the karaoke lyrics on the tv screen in front of them, the white cartoon ball bouncing quickly over the words, so that he seemed to struggle with the Lithuanian-to-English translation by the time it was his turn to sing.

"*It's not that I don't want to stay,*" Hannibal sang awkwardly, off-key but in this gruff, sexy tone that still turned Will on. His inability to stay on beat with the song was so cute, Will wanted to tear his clothes off. "*But every time you come too close, I move away…"*

He was barely audible, staring only at the microphone, the screen, or Will, as if the younger man would save him any moment. But then the chorus came and something shifted between the two of them, lifting Hannibal's mood.

"*Sometimes I run, sometimes I hide,*" Hannibal sang more confidently, still not remotely in tune, but louder and finally starting to enjoy himself. "*Sometimes I'm scared of you. But all I*

really want is to hold you tight, treat you right, be with you day and night, baby all I need is time…"

The song suddenly reminded Will so much of the early dates between them, how their emotions and desire seemed to be running so far ahead of Hannibal's fear of falling hard, how he had tried to resist and run from Will. How Will now understood completely that Hannibal had simply been terrified of emotions he had never felt before, but had since surrendered to. And he knew, without asking, that Hannibal had realized the same thing, and launched into more enthusiastic, if very comically bad, vocalization.

Actually, Hannibal was almost as bad as The Legendary Ray, with apparently no notion of how to accurately sing a single note, which came as a surprise given his stunning talent on the harpsichord and theremin. Still, Will reflected, nobody could be good at *everything,* and Hannibal possessed more talent in his little finger than anyone else he'd ever met. He was so damn attracted to competence, confidence and pride, and Hannibal had all three with so much powerful, sexy intensity. Even when he was doing an activity at which he completely sucked, Hannibal never backed down from a challenge or half-assed a thing.

Plus, the cuteness factor was through the roof. Hannibal, with his chiseled features, his dapper style even when dressed down a little, his tall, strong physique and pretty sweep of hair over his brow, struggling through a Britney Spears song -- *nobody* had ever been so irresistibly endearing. Will was a goddamn goner for the way that beige sweater clung to Hannibal's pecs, arms and stomach, the fabric soft, thin, almost see-through, the vague hint of the older man's nipples making him a bit feral. The jeans, such an unusually laid-back look on Hannibal, clung to his curvy thighs and gorgeous ass, and it was altogether *too much*.

The song ended and thunderous applause bloomed from the audience. Maddie whistled, "Awesome job, boys!" and Travis called out, "Here, here, excellent! Way to go!"

"Is it over?" Hannibal whispered as Will gathered their microphones and returned them to Earl, who was discreetly tugging one ear as if it had been injured by Hannibal's singing.

Will hugged him and rubbed his back. "Yes, honey, all over now. You did amazing! I had so much fun, did you?"

He pulled back and looked into Hannibal's deer-in-headlights face. "Yes," Hannibal answered, clearly surprising himself. "Yes, my dear, I truly did. But then, perhaps that is no great shock. I was with you, after all."

"You guys are so *cute*!" The lady with glasses and braids called to the stage.

"Brought a tear to my eye," said The Legendary Ray, placing a hand on his leather-clad chest. "Encore, encore!"

"No," Hannibal begged, looking at Will in desperation.

"We're gonna leave y'all wanting more," Will called to their newly adoring fans. "Goodnight, Becky's!"

With that, he guided poor Hannibal from the stage. “You’re free now,” he assured the older man, who sighed in deep relief.

“Thank heavens. I’m instilled with a whole new respect for all professional singers,” Hannibal sighed.

“We’re exhausted, boys,” Maddie admitted when they got back to the table. “Gotta head home. Thank you so much for coming, Hannibal, it was an absolute delight.”

“For me as well,” Hannibal nodded, then helped Maddie on with her coat and shook Travis’ hand. “Always a pleasure, Mr. and Mrs. Graham.”

When his parents were gone, Will gave Hannibal a Look. “Ready to go home?”

Hannibal shot him a bashful gaze in return. “Lead the way, mylimasis.”

Will knew they were both thinking of his own promises from earlier, and damn, after the ribs and karaoke, Hannibal was really going to get it for being so freaking cute. He could barely wait.

But when they walked out into the parking lot, arm in arm against the late November cold and the slushy snow falling lazily into half-frozen puddles on the ground, Will’s ever-inconvenient cell phone vibrated in his coat pocket.

“If this is Jack,” he announced, pausing to fish out the phone, “I’m going to disassemble this phone and throw it in that dumpster, immediately.”

He sighed as the screen lit up, *Jack Crawford.* So damn predictable, as much as Will’s kneejerk need to know if he could be of help, if innocents were in danger or had already been harmed. He couldn’t help but go to work if that was true, even though he wanted more than anything to go home and make love to Hannibal.

Hannibal was used to Will’s struggle of feeling torn between work and his personal life, his complicated morals and sense of obligation. “Don’t worry, Will, I understand. It’s as we always tell each other. Go where you need to. I’ll be waiting at home.”

“Thank you,” Will said with a frustrated flinch of a smile. “I wish I could get a break sometime--”

He took the call and said gruffly, “Jack?”

Hannibal waited, the snow falling into his hair, clinging to the silver, blonde and brown, gathering soft and wet on the shoulders of his black wool winter coat. He seemed almost eerily patient but expectant in a way Will did not yet understand.

“Okay,” Will said after hearing what Jack had to announce. “Yeah, no problem. I’ll be there in thirty.”

He pocketed his phone and gave Hannibal a careful look. Not so much questioning as confirming.

“The Ripper took another victim,” he shared, as if it was really necessary. Hannibal’s expression, hanging on Will’s reactions, cautiously optimistic, did not change.

“Then you must go.” Hannibal passed the Bentley keys to Will. “Take the car. I see your parents’ truck just over there, and they can give me a ride home. Your mother is quite sober after her white wine spritzers, and I notice she’s in the driver’s seat.”

They shared a wry smile at Travis’ proclamations of his wife having a low tolerance for alcohol when he was the one who got quickly tipsy and sentimental as Meg Ryan in a romcom.

"Are you alright to drive, Will?" Hannibal asked.

Will nodded. He took after his mom, and was clear-headed. "Yeah, I'll be okay."

A few more beats of heavy silence followed before Will added, “You’ll wait up for me, Hannibal.”

Not a question, a command. Hannibal submitted with a soft smile, something pleading in his eyes and wet on his warm lips in the cold night air and snow, a longing for recognition and acceptance.

“I’ll wait all night if necessary,” he promised. “I look forward to hearing all about your investigation when you return home.”

Chapter End Notes

This chapter featured an allusion to a lyric from Jonatha Brooke's song "Room in My Heart": "*'Cause I know your secrets, I have tasted their fruit / I have known the flash of your teeth in the dark*".

Next time: the Chesapeake Ripper reveals himself to Will. ❤️

I wanna live in a world where all your exes are dead :)

Chapter Notes

> The chapter's title comes from the song by Julia Michaels 🖤
>
> cw: some gory descriptions of Carter's corpse. Also, long, intense, kinky edging. A one-paragraph-only description of foot worship. Soft face-slapping, more like pat-pat, and a bit of half-asleep love-making, so mild hint of somnophilia.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will remembered Carter's apartment from the few times he'd half-heartedly come back to it with the man after their handful of dates. Carter was always so eager to please, and Will was lonely, enjoying the attention until his inability to reciprocate it became tiresome. That was the familiar, exhausting pattern of Will's dating history, making him feel empty inside, as if he was either too much or not enough for anyone he tried to connect with...until meeting Hannibal of course.

Carter's place was great, actually, window-dressing over a vacant soul, like his charm and impeccable taste in films and music. The airy studio apartment was done up in vintage 1920's furniture and decorated with framed posters of classic films, and he had an antique record player almost as pretty and impressive as Hannibal's. A vast collection of vinyl had once filled a bookcase in the living room which had recently been tipped over, leaving a spread of shattered record pieces on the hardwood floor, along with a broken goldfish bowl and a destroyed potted fern, dirt mixed in glass.

When Will came in with Jack, Jimmy held up a ziplock bag full of water with a small orange fish darting around inside. "I saved her! I think we got here just in time. There was just enough water left in the half of the bowl she landed in when the Ripper knocked her over--"

"Jimmy," said Jack drily.

Jimmy set the bagged fish down on a table that was one the few pieces of Carter's furniture which hadn't been brutally torn apart and left in shambles.

"It may not be the most important part of the case, but it does tell us something," Jimmy said pridefully. "The Ripper trashed this place, viciously murdered this man, and he even tried to kill the fish. The *fish*. That's petty."

Will paused briefly by Jimmy's side and murmured, "I'm glad you saved her," flashing a brief conspiratorial smile.

Beverly Katz crouched by what had once been an apple-red sofa. During the killer's chaotic outburst of destruction, the couch had been rendered nothing more than a pile of cushions,

stabbed and unstuffed, feathers and cotton filling all over the place. She picked up a feather caked in blood and bagged it.

“Hey,” she nodded at Will, her mouth set in grim dismay. “This is a hell of a scene. The Ripper’s M.O. is definitely changing.”

“*He’s* changing,” Jimmy Price affirmed. He was across the living room now, photographing Carter’s bloodied corpse while Brian Zeller examined the dead man carefully, his blue gloves pressing key places on the body to draw fast forensic conclusions.

“Yup. This is the Ripper alright, no question, Jack,” Zeller noted. “Everything here has been carried out with effortless surgical skill. Even with how upset the Ripper apparently was, many of the cuts were done purposefully, showing expertise in anatomy. He also took a *lot* of trophies, much more than usual.”

“The Ripper seems unhinged,” Beverly said, standing up and frowning at what was left of Carter, who was more of a stump than a corpse, really. “It’s scary. Scarier than usual, I mean. What happened to his almighty coldness?”

“Someone melted him,” Jack theorized. He stroked his beard and paced the room, batting ideas around his head like fireflies he had to catch. “Someone melted him right down to the ground. He’s mortal now.”

Will approached Carter, his brow furrowed in feigned concern as his heart fluttered in purest, most flattered bliss. He was so impressed, so honored. This was all for him.

Carter’s arms and legs had been cut off, most likely while he was still alive and kept conscious as long as possible. His eyes and tongue had been more violently removed, left in a grisly satire of a face on his chest. The record store owner’s chest and stomach had been sliced, his heart taken, along with his lungs, kidney, liver, intestines and spleen. The limbs and other organs had been taken as trophies, but Carter’s heart was crammed down his throat, which was disgustingly engorged by the intrusion. As a finishing touch, The Ripper had scattered peach drift rose petals all over the body.

The same roses Hannibal had used to decorate the bubble bath he drew for Will during after care. This was a valentine, addressed directly to Will, a loving confession, a tribute. Like the bracelet, the composition for him on piano, the extravagant meals, and the way Hannibal made love, as if Will was the most precious, irreplaceable joy of his life, to be endlessly spoiled and adored.

The murder must have happened earlier today, recent enough that the flowers were still fresh and Carter was just barely beginning to smell rancid beneath their sweet aroma. The blood was still wet and shining, and Will could see the reflection of his own rapt expression in the gleaming maroon pool spilling out around Carter, dripping through the floor boards to splatter the apartment below. This was how the downstairs neighbors had realized something was wrong and called the authorities.

Jack silently beckoned to the other team members to give Will space, and the profiler made a great show of closing his eyes and letting the pendulum of his almost supernatural empathy

into killers' minds drop across his consciousness.

Really, he didn't need a play by play in his vividly accurate imagination to know, beat for beat and blow for blow, exactly who had done this and why. Perhaps he had never known a happiness so powerful and true. Hannibal, his Ripper, his vicious cannibal, losing his cool because someone else wanted Will, had touched and kissed him. Had bothered Will, inconvenienced, made him uncomfortable. That wasn't allowed.

On the couch Hannibal had ripped apart, Will and Carter had once made out and exchanged oral sex while listening to a Sam Cooke record. Will recalled how it was hard to summon passion, and the pleasure which he gave and offered felt so superficial. Now this pleasure, the taste of Hannibal's obsessive love, the artistry of the Ripper's evil games, it was truly transporting...sublime.

Jack approached him cautiously a few minutes later. "You okay? Got anything?"

"I'm fine," Will answered briskly, trying to look wan with stress at this latest "awful" violence. "Just can't believe we haven't caught him yet. He keeps slipping through our fingers, and now...I almost feel he's mocking me."

"You, personally?" Jack grimaced. He'd been the victim of the Ripper's taunts before. "Because you're lead on his case?"

"I dated Carter Jackson," Will admitted, because it was necessary, it would come out eventually, and he could step so easily into the ready-made excuses Hannibal had left for him. "Briefly. But the Ripper might have assumed it was something more serious. At one point, Carter wouldn't stop texting me, after I called it quits. The phone records would have looked excessive."

"So the Ripper is angry with you for being close to catching him, and takes it out on a man he mistakenly assumes is your former soulmate." Jack shook his head. "We'd better assign some protection for you and Hannibal, then. If the Ripper has some vendetta against you…"

Will nodded, looking very serious and not at all amused at the idea of the FBI sending an agent to watch the house where the Ripper and his lover the Vigilante lived, to keep them safe.

"I guess we could use the protection."

"Why should it bother the Ripper so much that you're close to catching him?" Beverly wondered. She put a hand on her hip beneath her butter-beige leather jacket. "Never did before, he seemed to love the challenge."

"He's still flattered, but it's beginning to frustrate him that he might not win. He much prefers to be proven cleverest," Will surmised. "This is what he considers a polite warning for me to back off while I still can. Before I'm the one in his crosshairs out of necessity. He can't leave me in the wind much longer if I'm determined to catch him. I just might succeed."

“Sending me Miriam Lass’ arm,” Jack wondered, shivering at the traumatic memory. “Was that a similar message?”

“Yes,” Will agreed. “That was the Ripper telling you that you’ll never catch him, just keep throwing your life away needlessly, losing his trail until you lose yourself.”

“It’s almost as if he feels some sort of...friendly comradeship towards us.” Jack winced. “That gives me *bad* goosebumps. It’s chilling. Ghastly.”

“Maybe so,” Will reasoned. “But everybody needs a friend sometimes.”

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Hannibal had fallen asleep in the study at home waiting up for him, Will’s book of poems pressed in hand against his stomach. The fire had dwindled down in the grate to a half-hearted flush of orange-gold embers, gentle light gilding Hannibal’s already regal features, the high cheekbones and luscious lips, his long pale lashes, and the firm strong lines of his neck, collarbone exposed by his unbuttoned shirt collar. Will smiled. He could see one purple bruise left by his own teeth that morning.

Mine, all mine. Mine forever.

He paused on the way to his lover to crouch by the dogs and give them each a soft pat of greeting. They only barely roused at his entrance, then nuzzled into their fancy new cushions and drifted back into the calming ether of the deceptively soothing night.

The record player had been left on, circling the tracks of a Bat for Lashes album Will had given Hannibal, hoping he’d like it. The singer’s lush voice draped lovingly over velvet-lust lyrics,

“*Let's lay in your bed and dream together / In a world of our minds*
Just spending time in your bed / And walk forever in a silence divine
Just spending time in your bed…”

And Hannibal, Will’s splendid, majestic, blood-dipped ravenstag, his spectral heat of violent ecstasy. He had been allowing the tension of suspense to quietly build as they both wondered about each other’s secrets. Waiting, waiting, waiting for Will to See. Hannibal with his soft sleepy face and adorable bare feet sticking out of the jeans he’d bought in a careful, confused attempt to be “cool and casual” for Will. Hannibal, once so cautiously quiet with his feelings for Will, now unable to stop showing them, again and again, what a gift. He had finally shared all of himself with Will, taking the biggest risk of his life.

Hannibal, wicked and shameless, methodical in his brutality, horrifyingly dangerous at his most intellectually, subtly intent. How had Will been lucky enough to find this man, his beloved monster?

How beautiful, Will thought, as he always did when he watched Hannibal sleep. His attraction, his obsession was so magnified now it enveloped him entirely. Nothing had ever seemed more destined, and once he had thought “destiny” was just a lot of childish nonsense,

a fantasy to try and make sense of life's chaos. Only with his beautiful beast did Will understand, the sense was to be found in the chaos. Their design.

Will hovered above Hannibal in the shadowy room before sinking into his lap, slipping one hand into the soft hair at his nape. "Honey, I'm home," he purred.

"Oh…" Hannibal sat up in surprise, distraught. He blinked slowly, pursed his pretty mouth, and Will petted through his sleep-rumpled hair. "I didn't intend to fall asleep...you told me to wait up."

His hands flew automatically to Will's hips as the younger man straddled him. Darkness and danger brewed in the profiler's eyes as a roguishly intent smile curled his sumptuous lips.

Hannibal remembered in a flash of panicked anticipation that Will had been to the crime scene by now. Perhaps the best indication of Will's reaction he could have hoped for was happening: Will, in his lap, instead of charging in to arrest him, FBI agents flooding into the house behind him. No, they were quite alone.

By faint fire and lamp glow, Will was a menacing angel. Dim stripes of yellow-orange light streaked the parts of his handsome face not cloaked in shadow. Will, quietly terrifying, looking down on Hannibal from the lofty new height of truth.

Hannibal was completely intimidated, seen now fully naked in Ripper form. His heart thudded as his stomach swooped, like a rollercoaster plunge. But Will was warm, real, and fully present. He cast no judgement, anger or betrayed resentment down on his lover. He seemed, instead...

Euphoric.

"*Tell* me how you did it." Will cocked his head to one side and began unbuttoning Hannibal's shirt, nice and slow.

Hannibal swallowed hard as passionate longing dilated his pupils. His hands tightened on Will's hips but the profiler clucked his tongue with a soft smile and firmly pinned Hannibal's hands to the arm rests.

"Keep your hands down, Daddy. I'm in charge tonight. Now, describe what you did to Carter. How did you begin?"

"I...I wanted to draw it out for days." Hannibal's husky voice trembled over the admission as Will nodded, touching him too tentatively, running his fingers down his monster's skin like gently rippling river water in rhythmic caresses. He stroked Hannibal's face, as if learning him from scratch all over again, then traced his neck and pressed his thumb into the bruise he'd sucked there at the base, drawing a blissed-out gasp from the older man, whose hands clung to the chair.

"I thought so," Will murmured, honey sweet poison in his loving tone. "I was a little surprised that you ended up finishing him so quick. What happened?"

“I hated him.” Hannibal closed his eyes and submitted to Will’s feathery touches with abandon, his lips parted around another breathy moan when the profiler slipped his shirt off, then circled his fingertips all over needy flesh that heated up, tingled and craved so much more.

“He touched you,” Hannibal frowned, “he kissed you, possibly even seduced you...I *despised* him for that.”

Will paused with his hand planted on Hannibal’s chest, where he’d been slowly massaging his lover’s pectorals and lightly dragging his nails through the silvery curls there. Hannibal’s eyes opened wide again, glowing with vivid wrath; he snarled.

“I lost my senses at the thought of his hands and lips on yours, on your body, that you might have loved him instead of me.” His voice was an animal thing now, hoarse and unrepentant. “I forced myself to proceed as slowly as I could tolerate, at first...removing his limbs, keeping him awake, making him feel it…”

Will thumbed his lover’s nipples, his own expression thoughtful, brow creased, mysteries simmering in his deep blue gaze. Hannibal moaned into the dry flick of Will’s fingers over his sensitive nipples and bit his lip.

“He was helpless, in agony, and still, it wasn’t enough,” he recalled. “I tore out his eyes and tongue with my hands, sliced harshly when removing his organs, then I stuffed his heart down his throat.”

It was Will’s turn to moan as his cock filled out at the violent description.

“He never should have touched you,” Hannibal added in a rush of breath, “never should have harassed you later, when you wanted to be free again. I needed…I needed to *show* you, Will. Who I am. What we can Become.”

“I know that, love, and I’m grateful.” Will put his hand over Hannibal’s pounding heartbeat and smiled, his eyes sparkling with tears. “This metamorphosis is ours to share. We’ll kill together, and soon.”

“I’ve longed for that.” Hannibal’s own smile was almost meek, as if the light of Will’s reciprocation blinded him in disbelieving wonderment.

The record needle came to a slow halt with a fuzzy, quiet pop, the fire diminished entirely, the dogs dozed, and Will brought Hannibal up to bed.

He laid his lover down and loomed over him, delicately licking and biting Hannibal’s neck, his chest, then lapping and sucking his nipples, gliding a knowing hand down to the front of the doctor’s jeans where his cock bulged hard and ready.

“How long?” Will sighed, delighted at Hannibal’s pliant behavior and his continued litany of raspy moans. “Before Georgetown?”

“Long before,” Hannibal admitted, his chin tipping up as Will bit his low belly and undid his jeans, then licked his hip and sank his teeth there too, marking the vulnerable skin. “Oh -- *Will*--” He sucked in a breath, his stomach with hard abs and that hairy little curve going from concave to soft again in a few fluttering moments of painful yearning. “I began when I was fifteen. And for you? How long?”

“Oh, Hannibal. Love.” Eyes shimmering in shocked joy, Will reached up to cup his face, brushing fingers over his cheek. “Since I was fifteen.”

“My darling.” Hannibal was crying now, gently, tears leaking from his eyes.

He was going to cry so much more tonight, if Will had anything to do with it, but the pain would be pleasure, delectable, cutting and sweet. They had each found their perfect other half.

Hannibal blushed and tried to wipe his tears away, embarrassed by his sentimental reaction, still unused to this level of profound openness, but Will grabbed his hand and repeated gruffly, “I said *don’t.*”

He covered Hannibal’s body with his own and pinned his wrists beside his head. The doctor let his hands go limp and made himself subject to Will’s every whim, his breath shuddering, heart pounding incessantly against the answering bullet thud of Will’s tender organ pressed to his chest.

They were both rock hard, cloaked by inconvenient textures of clothing that tormented them in the deprivation of bare contact. Will could feel the thickness of Hannibal’s urgent need, flush against the impatient erection in his own jeans, and muttered, “*fuck,*” forgetting himself for a few moments as he ground his hips into Hannibal’s, stealing a few brief flashes of almost uncomfortable pleasure, intense ripples of it shooting from his groin through every pore and vein of his body.

He kept hard eye contact and brought their clothed cocks together one more time, then stopped again with his smooth, narrow torso on Hannibal’s rougher, broader one, long, powerful fingers laced through Hannibal’s bigger ones in a vice grip. Sweat glistened already on Will’s biceps as in a daze of lust he finally remembered he had to talk to communicate certain specificities.

“Don’t hide from me,” Will commanded, sterner than Hannibal had ever seen him.

The younger man shook his head, disapproval at Hannibal’s shyness and withered final defenses tempered by pure worship. As a mild form of punishment, a suitable prelude for what he had planned, Will lightly slapped both sides of Hannibal’s face, then entreated, “Are you listening to me, Daddy?”

Hannibal trembled, accepting the soft punishment with bliss. “Yes, baby. I promise to stop hiding. I’ll do anything you want, whatever you need. It’s what I was made for. I tried to show you that, with Carter…” Hannibal’s lips shook and more tears squeezed from his eyes; frustration shivered through him at the vulnerability that still hurt him, his pride falling away like a false second skin. He was reborn with every second in Will’s hands.

“The way I showed you, with Franklyn and Tobias.”

Hannibal whispered: “Yes.”

He looked up at Will like a saint gazing upon the consecrated host, the flesh of Christ made vivid sustenance. A God to pray before, be prey to, and prey upon in equal measures.

“I got your message, Will, your love letter scrawled in a gut-clench of jealousy and the stunning iridescence of your rage. So many shades of you, your limitlessness. You consume and baptize me. Show me a new faith. I hoped you’d approve of my prayer.”

His words intoxicated Will, falling onto his lips like forbidden holy wine to be licked and sucked down to the last dreg. Will *loved* his deep voice, his luscious accent, the poetic turn of his phrase, especially when he had no boundaries, no masks, only pure honesty. These lovely professions were pulled deep as marrow from Hannibal, and Will would treasure every one.

“My beautiful Ripper,” Will praised, making Hannibal try to rut against him with a ragged gasp. “My ruthless devil. Be mine, give me all your joy and pain, let me hurt you better than anyone ever has, and then heal you. Again and again. Will you depend on me, can you let go?”

Will gave a fondly reproving smile and let go of Hannibal’s wrists so he could tightly pin his hips down to the bed. “Uh-uh, that means, you’ll do as you’re told all night long, until dawn breaks and I finally show you some mercy. Do you know how goddamn elated you have made me, how I *feel* seeing you? Knowing that *mine* is all you ever wanna be?”

“I promise, I give myself entirely over to you, baby.” Hannibal quivered when Will leaned down with unpredictable, lightening speed and bit his neck harder than ever. Pain radiated immediately from the soreness of the fresh wound, and Will sucked the mark, drawing the devastating sensation out further. Hannibal lay very still and simply moaned, returning the wet, profane open-mouthed kisses which Will then laid all over his aching lips.

“I want you to turn over for me now,” Will murmured, guiding Hannibal as the older man turned onto his stomach. “Present to me, please.”

Hannibal went up fully on hands and knees, and Will began slowly pulling his jeans down, stopping when he had just exposed his lover’s round, smooth, ever-tempting ass.

“Mmm, *yes*,” Will said deliriously, jerking his own pants down and taking himself in hand; Jesus, he’d never been this hard; it hurt and ached through him, but he was going to make this last. Exactly like Hannibal deserved, like Hannibal had waited to be loved all through his life. Will understood all too well. He’d been in the same waiting room, only they hadn’t been able to see each other until now.

“You’re so goddamn perfect, it takes my breath away,” he sighed, gripping Hannibal’s ass tight on both sides, then sliding his heavy, reddened cock between the older man’s cheeks.

Hannibal felt the weight and hardness of Will’s arousal and clung to the bedding, letting out a noise that combined a mewl inextricably with a filthy declaration in Lithuanian. Will’s

wolfish grin widened as a shudder of pleasure rippled through him.

Every teasing stroke of his erection on Hannibal's ass, so close to his entrance, had Will salivating and keening to fuck in, but he held back and leaned over Hannibal so he could whisper in his ear.

"I want you to understand, you're not going to come for a very…" Will licked Hannibal's ear and bit the soft lobe, "*Very*...." He traced Hannibal's lips and allowed his Daddy to press little weak butterfly kisses all over his fingers. "Very long time. Are we clear?"

"Will…please." Hannibal licked Will's fingers as if begging, asking permission for more. Anything Will would give him.

Will spanked his ass roughly, enjoying the way Hannibal's soft curves bounced and turned rosy pink. "I said, are we clear?"

"Yes! Please, baby, yes, it's what I need and you know it."

"Why?" Will began kissing his back, tonguing his warm skin messily, savoring him.

"I don't know." Hannibal blushed redder. "Because I'm lucky enough that you love me."

"I do love you, Hannibal."

Will pulled Hannibal's jeans the rest of the way off and kissed his neck and shoulders some more while he slid his hands down to caress his stomach and chest again, with wide, rougher ministrations this time. "And you gave me such a beautiful gift. You deserve to come harder than you ever have in your life. Would you like that?"

"So much," Hannibal gasped. "You're so very good to me, Will."

Will went on groping Hannibal's ass while at the same time, he reached down and gave his lover's thick cock a long, firm stroke. "Oh, Daddy, look at you. So gorgeous."

Hannibal moaned at the praise as his fists tightened on the bedding.

"Here you go," Will invited coyly, giving Hannibal his fingers to suck on.

Hannibal fellated him with wild eagerness, swirling his tongue so that Will was soon coming undone, longing for his handsome Daddy to give him head. He knew that's what Hannibal wanted, to get Will so dizzily aroused, he'd get fucked faster, even get to come a little sooner, just a little. Hannibal loved to be edged, but he was also weak when he wanted Will inside him, prone to greediness that put a lovestruck smile on the younger man's face.

"Ahhh," Will sighed, "Your mouth is so good, perfect. Now then…"

He used his wet hand to stroke Hannibal's cock again, working the foreskin just right, brushing his thumb over the exposed tip at the perfect moment to make more precum dribble out, exactly on his command. Hannibal was *close,* so Will bit his shoulder from behind, humped his ass with reckless abandon, stroked him faster.

Right before Hannibal would have disintegrated into orgasm, Will took his hand away. “No,” he said simply, while Hannibal let out a disappointed moan.

“Oh, you’re lovely. Everything I would want you to be, and so much more.” Will stroked his hair and kissed his forehead. “You know I like it when you beg.”

“I can’t help myself.” Hannibal shivered and used the leverage of his hands planted to the bed to try and rock his ass against Will’s cock. His own erection stood to proud attention, so sensitive that Will’s slightest touch could send him over the edge. Will knew he’d have to be very, very careful.

“Hmm, I don’t think so, Daddy, but nice try.” Will went up on his knees and dragged Hannibal with him, yanking the older man against him, seizing both wrists and holding them firmly behind Hannibal’s back.

“I was just…” Hannibal muttered out a half-hearted, somewhat teasing excuse.

“Uh-huh, you were.” Will tortured him with one more quick slide of his cock under his ass and then added saucily, “I’m going to tie you up now.”

“Will--”

“Hannibal.” Will’s curls bounced around his face in a sweaty halo as he got up briefly to grab one of Hannibal’s ties, a paisley one much too elegant to have been designed for such a naughty purpose.

Like a good Daddy, Hannibal stayed right where Will left him, on his knees with his hands behind his back. Will grinned and wrapped the tie several times around Hannibal’s wrists, applying his fisherman’s expertise to ensure his lover had no hope of escape.

“Last chance,” he teased impishly. “Do you want me to tie you up, or let you go?”

“Tie me up,” Hannibal begged, “Never let me go.”

The mere oxygen in the room was enough to make either of their cocks jerk untouched, they were both so hard and needy. Will realized he was edging himself, too, and enjoying it thoroughly.

“There....not too tight?” He knew it was just right; he could side a finger under the bindings, but Hannibal wouldn’t be able to get out of the knot unassisted. The Chesapeake Ripper was entirely at his mercy.

Hannibal wriggled his wrists in a vain effort to loosen the bondage. “I’m quite helpless, Will. What do you intend to do with me?”

Will flung him face-first down onto the bed and came up behind him, putting his hands on the inside curves of Hannibal’s calves. “First, I wanna taste you.”

He cupped and squeezed Hannibal’s ass, licking his hole obsessively, lapping at him and kissing, humming in pleasure as the older man moaned, his fingers shifting nervously in the

desire to touch Will.

The sound of Will's excited moans and the wet smack of his lips, the way his tongue laved broadly all over Hannibal's hole, then curved to lick at him like the most scrumptious delicacy, had Hannibal crying out in ecstasy. The older man gave a single, desperate rock of his hips against the mattress as Will continued his raunchy, insatiable licking and groped his ass possessively.

Will gave one more naughty flick of his tongue over Hannibal's relaxed hole and slapped both ass cheeks hard. Hannibal moaned and Will shoved him fiercely down on the bed so that he couldn't move again, then climbed on top with almost all his weight pinning his lover in place.

"What pleasure are you allowed to take, Daddy?" Will asked, staring at Hannibal's red face pressed to the bed, his wild need so gorgeous.

"Only what you give me." Hannibal gulped. "I'm sorry, baby."

"I forgive you. But don't let it happen again or I'll tie up more, have you dangling from the ceiling and leave you here alone for a while until you're ready to behave."

"I'll behave," Hannibal promised. "I'll be good for you, Will."

"I know you will. That was a very nice apology." The profiler smiled indulgently and ruffled Hannibal's sweat-strewn hair. "I love you so much, Daddy, I'm going to give you a treat now."

He leaned back and got on his knees behind Hannibal, drizzled lube liberally on both of them, then lined up and pressed his cock slowly but very firmly into the older man's tightly embracing hole. Will let out a delighted, feral hiss at the much-awaited pleasure of being inside Hannibal.

Penetration was still newer for Hannibal, so the sudden, blunt intrusion of Will's rigid cock in his well-lubricated and prepared, but very tight body made him moan in shocked overwhelm. His bound hands reached up from behind to press to Will's stomach, silently entreating him to go in carefully.

"Too much?" Will asked, pulling out almost all the way.

Bewildered by the sensations, first feeling Will's cock was too big and sudden, now needing it back again, all the way, so badly it hurt, Hannibal cried hoarsely, more crocodile tears dripping to the teal blanket. "No, please fuck me, Will, give it to me again, if you think I deserve it."

Hannibal really had a way with words, even when he was being completely dismantled by pleasure and pain. Will draped his whole body over the doctor again, put his arms around Hannibal's neck in a loving headlock, and let his entire, slick, long member go deep inside, as far as he could fit.

“Oh, Daddy…” Will pulled his hips down and back, fucking in long, slow strokes, kissing Hannibal’s face lazily, and the older man’s legs came up to encircle Will, feet pressing to the profiler’s ass to push him in tight and deep.

“Naughty, naughty.” Will clucked his tongue, reached behind him to shove Hannibal’s feet down, and gripped his neck, fucking him so slow, painstakingly gradual thrusts, shallow and barely grazing his prostate.

He squeezed Hannibal’s neck and said in a heated rasp, high on the sweat slick of their bodies slapping together in a sinful duet, “If I ever tried to leave you, would you kill me?”

“Yes,” Hannibal admitted when Will loosed his grip on his neck to let him answer. “Oh, Will -- ah, ah--” Every thrust of hard cock into tight heat made him shiver and sweat, moaning like the greedy pillow princess only Will could make him into.

“I thought so. I’d kill you if you tried to leave me, too. Would you eat me, if I died?”

“I’d have to,” Hannibal sighed, moving his head desperately to try and kiss Will’s hand. Will took pity on him and let him kiss, then kissed his hot cheek.

“I understand. Don’t worry, my love, that will never happen. I’ll always stay with you, and you’re not going anywhere unless I let you. I don’t want you to have a damn thing in your life that matters as much as me.”

“Nothing ever could.” Hannibal reached up with his tied wrists, just briefly feeling the motion of Will’s hips slowly sinking against his ass, the profiler’s sizable erection gliding in again to the hilt, taking all the breath in his lungs.

“Ohhhh, Will,” he panted, and there followed a long statement in blurry, pleasure-drunk Lithuanian, with what sounded like some French haphazardly mixed in.

“You’ll let me crush you and smother you in my love. You won’t mind if I’m outrageously needy and spoiled, taking up so much of your time and energy, always wanting more.”

“Mind?” Hannibal grinned up at him so adorably, out of his mind with bliss as he was fucked more solidly into the bed, “Ahhh-- I’ll love it. I -- ohh, Will, baby, mylimasis, aaahhh-- I would not have it any other way.”

Hannibal’s body felt *so* damn good, and looked fucking amazing with Will’s cock going in and out, the doctor’s ragged cries filling the air along with his own grunts and gasps. Will looked over his shoulder and watched it happen for a few delicious thrusts, saw their reflection in the mirror and thrilled at the savage delight of their oneness.

He lost himself for a minute and took hold of Hannibal’s hips, making his lover’s ass bounce faster as he fucked to his heart’s content, pressure of joy building inside him like the sweetest electricity, lighting up his world. Hannibal started to back his ass up in time with Will’s thrusts, and the ease of the glide made the younger man’s eyes roll back.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck, Daddy, so good,” he muttered, pleased by the rising volume and pitch of Hannibal’s moans. “Don’t come, though.”

“Oh, please, Will, please, so close,” Hannibal begged, and Will smirked.

He grabbed Hannibal’s ankles and gave him a good pounding, getting him right to the precipice in no time. “So close, huh? Feels so fucking good you’ll burst, you’ll just die if I don’t let you come. Yeah?”

“Yes!” Hannibal whimpered. “Please!”

Will stopped thrusting even though it almost killed *him,* and dragged his sensitive, aching cock from Hannibal’s exquisite body with a deep shiver. He whispered in Hannibal’s ear. “No.”

Hannibal’s fingers curled into his hand, nails digging half-moons in his palms. He cried some more and Will soothed him.

“Shhh, shh-shh, Daddy. Come on now, you said you’d be good. Tell me why I’m making you wait.”

“To-- because…” Hannibal stopped flinching and relaxed his hands again, breathing deeply in and out, calming at Will’s command. “Because when you finally let me come, it will be much more intense because you took me to the brink and stopped me so many times.”

“That’s right.” Will smiled and guided Hannibal to turn over.

The doctor’s cock curved heavily towards his stomach and he was red-eyed, scarlet-cheeked, panting. So, so beautiful like this, as no one else would ever see him.

Will spent some time languidly alternating between teasing sucks on Hannibal’s dick and balls, then worshipped his feet, one at a time. Hannibal sighed and moaned as Will massaged and licked his toes, softly kneaded his skin and pressed his solar plexus points, making him relax at the same time his arousal built at the lingering, wet and soft attention. Will walked his thumb from the base of Hannibal’s foot to each toe, then kissed and lovingly bit his ankles and started all over again.

Hannibal had been close again when Will sucked his cock and played with his balls, close when Will kissed and massaged his feet, knowing every perfect sensitive place and pressure point, and he nearly shattered again when Will introduced a candle.

“Shhhh, it’s okay,” Will soothed, dripping hot wax down Hannibal’s chest and abs.

Hannibal held his shaking arms aloft, his bound hands grabbing at the headboard for leverage as the hot dribble cascaded down his sensitive skin. His back arched off the bed and Will stroked his face. “The candle was made for this, I got it just for you. The wax is good for your skin, Daddy. Smells good, too, huh?”

“Yes, thank you, baby.” Hannibal closed his eyes, relaxed his body into the bed again, and inhaled deeply of the candle wax aroma, cedar, jasmine and mandarin. He scented out Will,

too, his new cologne and the sticky-sweet smell of their sex, and as another light smattering of wax poured down his skin, aimed by Will's careful hand to stimulate and arouse, his cock twitched and leaked precum.

"No," Will sighed, so lovingly. He stroked Hannibal's stomach. "No, I'm sorry, but it's still too soon."

Only after he had played with Hannibal's hole using a vibrator, then a dildo, and then ate him out again, Will slid his cock back into his shaking, weeping lover.

Dawn was beginning to break, blue-grey clouds shot through with brightest orange and softest pink, vaguely visible through the gauzy curtains. Hannibal had been so incredibly strong, so brave. Will had never been prouder.

He had Hannibal on his stomach again, pressed tight to the bed with Will's hand pushing his tied wrists to his back, rutting in with solid, quickening thrusts. But Will needed even more, deeper, closer. He climbed further up the bed, knelt over Hannibal, then fucked fast, straight to his prostate, building it up and up and up.

Hannibal, at this point was past defenseless. He wasn't even entirely awake, just conscious enough to emit continuous "uhh-aaahhh, ahhhh" whines and take what he was given.

Now, as Will shifted to a position which allowed for the utmost depth and fucked him aggressively, Hannibal roused with a hungrier cry.

"Yeah," Will encouraged, "That's it, there you go. It's all for you, sweetheart. Come on, give in. It's okay. Come for me. Say my name. Tell me who you belong to, who you'll live and die and kill for."

"*Will*!" Hannibal's body convulsed as he came with thundering intensity, cum thickly spurting from his cock, pleasure roaring through him from head to toe. It was so powerful he panicked and shook like a leaf, crying his eyes out.

"Aww, it's okay, Daddy, that's okay." Will untied his hands, massaged and kissed his wrists, then kissed all over his face and cupped it. "You just never knew you could come that hard. You're fine, I'll take care of you."

Hannibal closed his eyes and lifted his weak elbows, pulling Will down into a hug. "Thank you, baby, so much...so...I….ohhhh…"

"I know." Will kissed his forehead. "Do you want my cum now?"

Hannibal had finally recovered enough to smirk up at him, giving Will back his naughty sass in equal measure. "You know I want it."

Will leaned over his chest and thrust into Hannibal's eager, open mouth, careful not to give into the urge to deep throat him. His lover was too tired for such rough treatment, and even offering his wide, slack mouth and his lazy but adoring licks was a lot of work for Hannibal

in his current state. It didn't take much, though, not after hours of waiting and witnessing Hannibal at his most gorgeously broken.

He pulled out just in time to come all over Hannibal's face, groaning and swearing loudly as the euphoric sensation of postponed release poured through him. Hannibal caught as much cum as he could on his tongue while the rest of it looked very fucking pretty painting his elegant cheekbones and sticking to his five o'clock shadow.

Hannibal was asleep for most of the aftercare, but Will had expected that. He took his time gently cleaning his lover with a warm, wet cloth, then rubbed salve over the places where he had spanked, scratched and grabbed hard, leaving countless marks. Then he tucked Hannibal in and gave a huge yawn and stretch. It only took him a couple more minutes to clean himself up in the bathroom; they could take a nice long bath in the afternoon...Hannibal would surely sleep until noon at least after the treatment he'd had.

Will would wake when the alarm on his phone chimed in a few hours, feed and walk the dogs, then climb into bed with Hannibal and cuddle him until the older man woke. Then Will would make breakfast, scrambled eggs, bacon and toast, simple but delicious and restorative, and they'd feed it to each other in bed, laughing and kissing and stroking each other's bodies.

Jack would be calling upon Will one of these days fairly soon, following up on the Ripper and Vigilante cases separately. A plan was obviously needed for navigating through the FBI's various suspicions and investigations, but Will wasn't worried. He'd never been happier or more hopeful in his life. He and Hannibal could talk about it tomorrow, while he rubbed gingery shampoo into his beautiful monster's hair and kissed his wet shoulders. They'd figure it out.

With a peaceful and rapturous hum, satisfied and excited for the future, Will snuggled down under the covers and put his head on Hannibal's chest. Hannibal's arms automatically went up around him as the Ripper loosed a happy sigh and slipped deeper into sleep. Will nuzzled into all that firm muscle and tickly chest hair just the way he liked best, and surrendered to his own gory and blissful dreams.

Outside, parked on the street next to Hannibal's house, the second shift of FBI security took over from the first, two yawning officers going home after an uneventful night of watching a peaceful home. Two more agents would be posted there on the quiet, nobly posh street for hours, with more sent to Hannibal's office to ensure his safety.

Chapter End Notes

Coming up: Probably a lot more tooth-rotting fluff and indulgent smut, let's face it! Plus, the continued development of the FBI investigation into the Ripper and Vigilante cases, and a few more surprises. 💕

Thanks again to all who have been reading and left kudos and lovely comments!

Nervous

Chapter Notes

> The song for this chapter is "Nervous" by Nick Jonas, which was a huge influence on the emotional underpinning of the story, especially from Hannibal's POV. 💕

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“So are we allowed to kill independently anymore, or...is that too much like cheating?”

Will smiled up at Hannibal from where he lay in bed with his head nestled on his lover’s thigh, Hannibal’s fingers running through his curls that were still damp from their bath.

“Are we allowed to kill separately, 1-2-3,” Will counted, their cue to answer the question in unison. He ticked the numbers off on his fingers as Hannibal chortled, picking another fresh strawberry out of the bowl on the bed, dipping it in whipped cream.

“No,” they said at the same time, then laughed rapturously. Hannibal fed a bite of the strawberry to Will, who nibbled and licked the whipped cream from his big fingers, wriggling in delight.

He *loved* this, their lazy day together, the morning after they finally confessed their murderous alter egos. The total openness of lying there, wrapped in nothing more than a fresh set of Hannibal’s ridiculously soft billion thread-count creme-colored sheets and each other, Will’s fingers traipsing slowly up Hannibal’s arm to caress his bare shoulder, his eyes bright on the older man’s face, happily entrapped in a liquid amber gaze, ready to drown there forever.

Will had one knee bent against Hannibal’s torso while the doctor massaged his leg. The Chesapeake Ripper was a notorious snuggler, as it emerged, much like Will himself, and they both ran naturally hot, making for a delicious press of skin that went from warm to burning the more they touched.

“Annual vacations where we throw all responsibility aside and go somewhere fantastic for an adventure?” Will proposed. “1-2-3--”

“Yes,” they both said, grinning.

“Paris?” Will suggested.

“And Florence.” Hannibal traced his finger from Will’s forehead all the way down his nose, treating it like the cutest little ski slope. “I would dearly love to show you Florence, Will.”

“Take me all over the world.” Will leaned over and kissed Hannibal’s thigh, then his knee, and gave him another pampered, adoring smile. “You know I’d follow you anywhere. Can I take you on a sailing trip, too? You can just sit back and relax, let me do all the work…”

“Let you walk about the boat completing nautical-mechanical-navigational tasks of which I have little understanding, preferably whilst you are shirtless, in a pair of those dreadful little blue jeans?” Hannibal smirked and raised his eyebrows. “I would be only too happy. If you engage me as the ship’s official chef, of course, and if I can wear one of those white sailor’s hats--”

“You’ll be wearing nothing else by the time I’m done. I’ll fuck you below *and* above deck, especially if there’s a vague chance someone else might see.”

“Aye, aye, Captain.” Hannibal flashed his fangs and saluted Will jauntily. His fingers kneaded Will’s calf and then wrapped around his ankle, feeling the bump of his bones, the softness of his skin as he added more seriously, reflectively, “Stay here in this life unless we are ever apprehended and must flee? Keep our current cover lives intact, the proximity to your family?”

Will returned his gaze with equal thoughtfulness.

“1, 2, 3,” Hannibal added, then they said together, “Yes.”

Hannibal guessed, “Your parents know nothing about your--”

“No, and they can never find out.” Will shook his head firmly. “That means we’ll have to be exceptionally careful. If my mom and dad ever knew...it would destroy them, break their hearts. I can’t lose them, Hannibal.”

“Of course, mylimasis.” Hannibal swept Will’s curls back from his brow and let them drop again before twisting a few around his fingers to watch them spring free. “I promise to keep your secret locked deep in my heart forever. And to protect our cherished life here with all my strength.”

“You’re very strong. I trust you. I trust you with everything I am and all that I have.” Will caught Hannibal’s hand when the Ripper moved from playing with his curls to caressing his cheek.

“As I trust you, dearest.” The soft rumble of his voice sent a shiver of poignant love down Will’s spine.

Kissing Hannibal’s knuckles, he added cautiously, but a bit sternly, “And I want you to let Miriam Lass go.”

“I certainly shall. Ms. Lass has done nothing to offend me, and her status as my prisoner has only ever been a result of her ingenuity, and the need for protecting my interests in result. She will also play a key role in an upcoming drama which will ensure Jack Crawford never learns who the real Chesapeake Ripper is.”

Will lit up with interest. “You made her think the Ripper is someone else? So fully that she’ll identify this other person as such to Jack?”

Hannibal nodded. “You and I, so long as we remain eminently careful, need not be too fearful of Jack’s snares.”

“Who the hell is vile enough that you thought they deserved to go down for your crimes?” Will asked, more out of curiosity than pity. He didn’t doubt Hannibal would only do this to a truly awful person.

Dr. Lecter had seldom looked so amused. “Have you ever met Dr. Frederick Chilton?”

Will blinked up at him for a few suspended moments as he considered this revelation before he dissolved into laughter, curled up on Hannibal’s lap while the older man chuckled along and hugged Will close, preparing another strawberry with a dollop of whipped topping.

They ate the strawberry together and Will settled sitting up more, head against Hannibal’s shoulder, held nice and snug there while sweet fruit and sweeter kisses were offered his eager lips. Hannibal nuzzled their noses together, placed a smear of whipped cream on Will’s lips and licked it off, then kissed both his cheeks, ecstatic, unable to stop showing it.

“You teaching me how to cook?” Will asked, “1-2-3--”

“Yes,” they agreed, and Will laughed, “You just want to come up behind me and put your arms around me, kiss my neck when I’m trying to make one of your fancy recipes to see if you can throw me off enough that I burn something.”

“I’m sure you’ll learn something,” Hannibal retorted cheerfully. He stretched his long legs and flexed his feet under the sheets, pondering the idea. “Which counter smarts the most when you are shoved up against it and fucked senseless, for example. Which condiments you most like to be slathered in while I lick it all off you...strawberry sauce, marshmallow? Chocolate?”

“Take your pick,” Will laughed, “I look forward to it, Daddy.” He waggled his eyebrows and squeezed Hannibal’s thigh, then added another question. “Can I teach you how to fish?”

Hannibal groaned and rolled his eyes, making Will laugh even harder. His stomach ached with all the giggles and joy.

“1,” Will snorted, clutching his tummy as more giggles came, “2, 3--”

“Yes,” Will insisted while Hannibal glowered, “No.”

“*You,*” Hannibal accused, “Only want to see me completely out of my depth and up to my stomach in cold river water, tangled in fishing wire, wearing a set of those unfortunate ‘waders’ and desperately in need of your assistance.”

“I’ll save you, don’t worry.”

“I never doubted it for a moment, my dear. Very well, but only if....I may take you back to the opera,”

“Reaaallly?” Will pouted, playfully kicking Hannibal’s leg under the sheet. “It was *boring,* Daddy, I didn’t understand it and all your snobby friends were pawing at you and flirting. I can’t promise I won’t get bored, annoyed and possessive again, and kill more than two this time.”

“Will Graham,” Hannibal said, solemn despite the amusement still twinkling in his eyes. He kissed Will’s hand like a courtly gentleman, Mr. Darcy incarnate, and promised, “I thoroughly regret my mistakes the last time I attempted to bring you into my world. I want another chance to do it properly, treat you as the Prince you are and make all of my ‘snobby friends’ bow at your throne, showing your beauty proper deference.”

“Well,” Will stalled, pretending to hesitate in bristling residual irritation, really completely charmed by his romantic hero, his king. “I don’t know…”

“1, 2, 3,” Hannibal prompted -- “Yes--”

“Yes, yes, okay, yes,” Will allowed. “You are altogether too charming for either of our good, I hope you know.”

Smugly, Hannibal took a sip of the mimosa Will had made him, and passed Will’s own slender flute of bubbly orange drink to him.

“Mmm,” Will said, savoring the tart burst and the tickly bubbles giving him a quick rush of flavorful liquor.

Will’s toe dragged down Hannibal’s ankle and he sipped his drink again, then put it on the table next to his side of the bed before returning his appraising gaze to Hannibal’s face.

“Open relationship?”

Hannibal looked suddenly very cross and Will fought back the urge to tickle his irresistibly hairy, soft belly. Will would *never* want an open relationship, of course.

“Well, we both know we’re too jealous to stand the other *cheating,*” Will went on teasingly, knowing he was getting himself in deep trouble and loving it. “At least if we have a previously agreed upon *arrangement,* with the requisite understood limits and such, we can avoid any hurt feelings…”

“Will,” Hannibal growled, lifting Will like he weighed no more than a feather and positioning his naughty boy right in the center of his lap, Will’s arms instinctively circling his neck, his thighs pressing warm to Hannibal’s waist.

"Okay, okay, I'm just kidding, really! I can't stand the idea of other people even wanting you, never mind having the nerve to touch you. C'mon, you know that."

“I’m going to kill you,” Hannibal said, strict and rough, and Will nodded with a besotted sigh.

“I’d let you.”

“I know you would,” Hannibal swooned, leaning in to kiss Will’s lips, sharing the strawberry-orange-alcohol flavor of their joining wet heat, tongues lashing and tangling, slow and deep, ready to eat each other alive, always.

He grabbed Will by the back of his hair and dug his fingers in tight, forcing Will’s unrelenting eye contact, his own face torn asunder by desperate, obsessive infatuation.

“And you would enjoy it,” Hannibal predicted.

“Yes.” Will whispered now, eyes shining with tears of pleasured pain at the tight tug of Hannibal’s powerful grip on his soft curls, lips reddened and plump with devouring kisses, tingling for more. “You’d like me killing you, too. You know I’d make it good.”

“So good, my darling. Nobody could do it better, I’d only want you.”

Their cocks had reawakened finally, arousal reviving at the raunchy entendres of their murder talk, Hannibal’s thicker, heavy uncut erection pressed right to Will’s longer, firm, circumcised cock as their balls brushed together. Will’s nails sank into Hannibal’s back, right into bruises he’d left with his teeth the night before in the blinding smear of edging his lover out of his mind. Hannibal moaned and looked at him, dark and feral, the beast, casting a thrall of fascination over Will like a net he let take him, a cage he walked right into.

“You took a lot of trophies from Carter. More than any of your other victims, Zeller said.”

His cannibal was blushing, beautiful, shy. Shy for Will and no one else. How Will *adored* him like this. Hannibal was cruel and vicious enough to chill anyone’s blood, but that’s what heated Will’s up like wildfire, licking the inside of his skin. And with his Will, he was always prone to these surprising lapses into delicacy, uncertainty, tentativeness.

Hannibal’s tender, bruised heart was right in the palm of Will’s hand, forever to be treasured and protected, honored. Hannibal’s heart was home.

The Ripper ducked his face. They were still pressed together in rigid, leaking arousal, sweat beginning to bead their brows, backs and biceps, but heartfelt longing for acceptance had come in to flavor the mood with more than lust.

“Look at me, honey.” Will tipped Hannibal’s face back up, but the older man still avoided his searching gaze. “C’mon. What is it?”

“I thought...if you wanted to…”

“We could eat him together?” Will smiled, caressing his thumb over the five o’clock shadow on Hannibal’s cheeks. He’d encouraged his lover *not* to shave that morning, because the idea of a bearded Dr. Lecter turned him on.

Hannibal looked stunningly handsome like this, a little rougher with the beard growing in and his drying hair slipping down across his forehead, obscuring one big brown eye. Will brushed the errant silky lock back and looked deeply into both of those pretty caramel eyes that

shimmered with fear of rejection that had been built into him by virtue of his monstrous secrets. What he did was so shockingly taboo, he'd long ago assumed no one else would want this.

"Yes. Only if you wanted to."

"I know, I get that, sweetheart. We'd begin with cuts of his flesh, from the limbs you kept, and then…? Tell me, Hannibal, I'm right here, with you, for you." He lifted Hannibal's hand and pressed it to his steady heartbeat. The Ripper would find no fear in the reassuring pound, only love and longing.

"Then his kidneys, his liver...it would be...ceremonial. An initiation. I'd make blood pudding in oranges, spiked with absinthe. We could...indulge a bacchanal, feast upon the flesh and blood of our enemy, together."

Hannibal whispered the word *"together,"* soft as crushed rose petals.

"We could make love on the table-top," Will suggested. "Surrounded by human bones and extravagant centerpieces, black orchids, ripe berries. Tasting the blood and flesh on each other's lips while you drive so deep into me…"

"You…" Hannibal took Will's face in both of his hands, overcome with astonished worship. "Will, you would…"

"I want to share *everything* with you." Will vowed. "Everything," he whispered, and they kissed, gently, soulfully, feeling complete.

"You're so lovely like this," Will added, pressing his forehead to Hannibal's. "So perfect. Wanting and doubting, but...why is it you still wonder if I'm all in? If I'll love you forever, if nothing you could ever say or do, nothing in your past could ever turn me away, when I've told you so many times…"

"I'm sorry," Hannibal sighed, and the deep breath he took was raspy with feeling. "I. Will. I don't doubt you, not exactly. Except in questioning how such a vision of perfection could take apparently mortal form, and that fills me with urgent protectiveness. No, it isn't doubt. It is only that…when I look at you…"

He did so then, his fingers so tender and gentle under Will's chin, stroking his jaw. The Ripper's lips curved in a shuddering smile. "When we go out together somewhere and I see you across the room when we've been parted for a few minutes, and I see again, as if for the first time, how magnificent you are, how radiant, feeling how anyone would die to love you, touch you, belong to you, it strikes me so deeply. And then, when we come home together, and you tell me you love me, want me, for all that I am…"

Will smiled attentively and slid his thumb along the path of salt a tear left on Hannibal's cheek. "What? You can tell me anything. And I'll tell you everything."

Hannibal nodded, recognizing the same words he'd said to Will a few weeks ago, making love before they shared the whole truth.

“You still make me nervous,” Hannibal admitted. “Will...I think you’ll always make me nervous.”

“Yeah?” Will closed his eyes and placed the most amorously sensitive kiss on Hannibal’s lips, light and careful, his fingers trailing down Hannibal’s face. “Will you make love to me? I want to show you something.”

Hannibal, lost in bewildered oceans of feeling, used Will for a compass. He put his large, warm hands firmly on Will’s stomach, but went no further, his eyes darting down, and Will could tell he wondered if the younger man would like to ride him, if he should shift position to accommodate -- because he would always make love to Will, could never say no, was thinking of it incessantly anytime it wasn’t happening.

“No, not like this, like…” Will took Hannibal’s hands in his and fell back, lying on his back, pulling Hannibal over him missionary style.

Soft. Almost...healthy, “normal,” vanilla. All words that had no meaning or value to either of them. They felt the dagger’s edge in this gentle intimacy, digging deeper into their connection, merging two mind palaces that once felt so lonely.

Hannibal smiled and kissed down Will’s neck, chest and stomach, brushing warm, wet lips, bringing Will’s nipples to rosy moist attention, licking the stiff nubs then biting softly. Will moaned and surrendered, more so when Hannibal went down on him, slowly sucking his engorged length, taking him to the base while his fingers remained on Will’s chest, toying exquisitely with his nipples.

Will’s legs shook, hips arched off the bed as his toes curled. He met Hannibal glide for thrust, pushing his shaft into his lover’s throat, pulling out again and putting his hand shakily in tawny hair that shone in golden afternoon sunlight. Hannibal grinned, content as a cat with his throat newly wrecked.

“Need you, Daddy,” Will begged in a whimper like spun gossamer, pulled so tight and needy by Hannibal’s every breath-stealing move.

Hannibal’s lips turned up in a sweetly naughty smile full of so much admiration and desire. His mouth was slick with Will’s precum and the saliva he’d left all over the younger man’s cock. After locking eyes again, Hannibal groped Will’s soft thighs and leaned down to blow on the profiler’s achingly hard dick.

“Hnnnhhhh--- H*aaannnn*ibal, *fuck,*” Will blurted, pleasure skating up his cock in a steady breeze as Hannibal’s breath met the wetness on his skin.

“My good boy.” Hannibal bit both his thighs, then readied him for the taking with extravagant lapping and twirling of his tongue, until he dipped it barely into Will’s entrance. He felt Will tugging impatiently on his hair, lost in the decadent tease of foreplay, and knew his lover was fully prepared.

He stared into Will’s eyes as he eased a lubricated middle finger into the slick, tight warmth inside him, and Will sighed, holding Hannibal’s back with patient tenderness, keeping his

legs nice and wide, making it easy.

“Do you know what I thought -- ahhh! Yes-- what I thought the first time I saw you?” Will gasped.

Hannibal shook his head, adding a second finger and crooking both to pleasure Will’s prostate before beginning a steady in and out thrusting, his cock throbbing with the sensation of the agent’s luscious desire, the way Will clenched and relaxed in time with his movements, moaning and throwing his head back.

“I thought, I want to fuck him more than I’ve ever wanted to fuck anyone in my life.” Will’s breathy recollection dissolved into heady whines of bliss as the saucy remark made Hannibal slam his hand in faster and faster. “Then, when I...when I got to know you, I thought, how can I ever hope someone so perfect and -- ahhh, so above me, this god of a man, how could he ever want me, what can I possibly do to make him mine?”

“And then?” Hannibal kissed his mouth so passionately it took Will a few moments of world-tilting distraction to answer.

“Then you let me fuck you, and it was *everything*,” Will remembered as Hannibal kissed his face, his neck, ran fingers through his hair and slicked his bulging cock between the younger man’s thighs, barely grazing Will’s sex, “Everything…”

Will’s eyes dropped shut as he moaned into Hannibal’s frotting, the older man picking up speed, sliding their lengths together to create perfect friction.

“But you wouldn’t let me in your heart.” Will flung his legs back in effortless time with Hannibal’s body sinking forward on top of him. “I almost gave up. I thought not having you again would kill me.”

Hannibal’s strong biceps pressed to the backs of Will’s legs as he kissed him more and entreated, “What then?”

“You came back to me.” His fingers pressed to Hannibal’s broad, fuzzy chest as the older man crushed closer against him, raining kisses all over his face, his lips, his neck. “You -- oh, God, look at you, you’re so fucking sexy, Hannibal -- this time you came back to stay, and…”

“Mmm-mmm-mmm,” Hannibal replied with three wet, smacking kisses to Will’s swollen lips. “And--”

“Then I heard you sing Britney Spears,” Will laughed with his legs dangling around Hannibal’s shoulders, feet up in the air.

Hannibal chortled and bit his neck. His new beard felt almost as good rubbing there with scratchy-soft friction, as it did against Will’s thighs.

“Yes, it made me fall even more in love with you, but when -- mmm, that’s nice, kiss me there again...I saw what you did to Carter, I thought, I want to spend the rest of my life with you. If you’ll let me.” Will turned pink and hoped he hadn’t said too much.

The smile faded from Hannibal's face and he looked very serious then. He sat back, one hand on Will's thigh, kneading, while Will lay there open and waiting with his fingers latched to Hannibal's thigh. Hannibal spit into his hand and stroked his cock, then pushed inside Will and hugged him close again, covering Will with his warm body like a blanket while his girthy dick stroked deep.

"Aahhh, Daddy, Daddy," Will cried out, clinging to Hannibal's shoulders, folded in half with his legs pinned in place around his lover. "Fuck, so good--"

"*Je t'aime de tout mon coeur,*" said Hannibal huskily, working his cock in and out, slow, deep and *hard,* his teeth back in Will's neck, grazing, nipping, biting and sucking, tonguing, too much, his murmurs in French going to Will's heart and dick in equal measure.

"*Je veux être avec toi pour toujours.*" He moved back, knelt and lifted Will's lower body, fucking faster, groaning in pleasure as Will let out a pained, euphoric plea.

"Ohh --- *oh!*" Will hadn't been ready for how enormous Hannibal felt from this particular angle, as if he would be split open, and his astonished concern at the confusing blend of sensations made the older man laugh gently and ease up on him.

"Daddy's awfully big like that, isn't he, baby?"

Hannibal solved the "problem" by picking Will up and arranging him in front of the dresser across the room, where there happened to be another mirror.

"Try it like this." Will braced his hands against the surface of the dresser and leaned forward obediently, looking into his own wide blue eyes while Hannibal pressed back into his body with one firm stroke, pulling jagged moans from them both. It was even deeper when Hannibal flung one of Will's legs over the top of the dresser as well. "Is that good, Will? Is this what you need?"

Hannibal spanked him and admired his pretty, pale ass, driving his cock in and gripping Will's waist while the younger man reached one hand down and jerked off in front of the mirror, panting and crying out curses.

"I know you like to watch yourself being fucked by Daddy," Hannibal grunted, and Will almost howled his helpless assent while the older man pounded into him and their skin slapped together loudly.

"You're a very naughty boy, Will. Look how well you take it."

Will didn't need to be asked twice. Few things excited him quite so much as watching his own red-faced, near-drooling, whorish expression close up in a mirror he was fogging with cries of "fuck me harder, Daddy," and watching how powerful and fierce Hannibal looked rutting against him, his hair hanging in his face.

"Very, very naughty boy. You drive Daddy mad, and you know it. Je suis amoureux."

He fucked Will so hard the dresser knocked against the wall and Will would have gone flying right across the top of it if Hannibal hadn't had a hand tight on his shoulder while the other one dipped fingers into the profiler's mouth in rhythm with his thrusts.

"I love it when you speak French to me," Will moaned, "Oh, God, your *voice,* never stop--"

"Je t'adore...mon tresor…" Hannibal grabbed Will's hips and gave an especially hard thrust which, coupled with his words, made the younger man come all over his hand and the dresser, shivering and mumbling Hannibal's name as his body went almost numb with shocking pleasure.

"Yes, baby, that's it --" Hannibal fucked Will through his orgasm, making the throes of so much better, and then he pulled out and pushed the agent to his knees on the rug. The older man stood over him, stroking his cock with clear intent.

"My pretty little slut, so perfect for Daddy," Hannibal exulted as Will looked up at him in a haze of feverish post-orgasmic joy, placing his hands on Hannibal's hips and leaning in to envelop his cock in exquisite soft, wet heat.

"My angel," The older man sighed hoarsely. He grabbed the back of Will's head and fucked deep into his mouth, then Will bobbed his head so expertly that Hannibal let go and allowed him to take over. In no time flat he was growling, taking his cock in hand and bringing himself off with a few swift strokes, coming onto Will's tongue and splashing more thick white seed on his face.

Will batted his eyelashes, some of which were covered in cum like his eyelid, and Hannibal cried out in ecstasy at the erotic sight and the pleasure still flooding his body. The younger man slurped and sucked at him, sighing "Mmm, yes," over and over until Hannibal had to detach his aching, oversensitive cock from Will's obsessive worship.

"Oh," Will sighed, melting as Hannibal picked him up in a bridal pose and carried him to the leather chair by the bed and held him tight on his lap, Will curling up and clinging.

Hannibal couldn't seem to stop breathlessly kissing him, hugging him as if he was frustrated by the inability to get Will closer than was actually possible.

"What is it?" Will asked in concern, knowing the signs of Hannibal's anxiety flaring up.

"You're…" Hannibal frowned and sighed, disappointed in some perceived weakness on his part, and admitted finally, "You're very, very good at lovemaking, and sometimes I can't contain my jealousy, wondering who taught you so well, who had you before me...please understand I am not judging you for having past lovers...I've had them too, I've done everything I could think of to try and shake loose a human emotion from my soul and finally *feel*..."

"I haven't been with that many people, I'm too damn picky," Will said with a gentle laugh. "I know you're not judging me, and I know you have to hate anyone who's touched me in the past, the way I want to kill *your* old lovers…"

“Old?” Hannibal smirked through his conflicted mood, “An intriguing way for you to conceive of them.”

“Shut up,” Will pouted, grabbing a blanket from the top of the chair. He cleaned off his face, then added petulantly, “I like to think of them as *old* and *boring*.”

“I’m older than you, and you don’t seem to find me boring.”

“Not *sexy*-old like you, just...you know. Unattractive, dull, you can’t imagine how you ever spent time with them when you have me now, that sort of thing.”

“Yes,” Hannibal conceded, wrapping Will up in another embrace. “That sort of thing.”

“Anyway. Most of what I learned about sex comes from masturbation, toys, and a really embarrassing amount of porn,” Will confessed. “I’ve had my tries at romance over the years, but they just weren’t you, and it wasn’t this. You bring it out of me, whatever it is that makes you think I’m good in bed. It’s all you. I just want to adore you in every way I can, and...this is how it comes out.”

“Lapis lazuli,” Hannibal said in a quick burst of inspiration. He cupped Will’s face, staring into his eyes with an almost scientific fascination.

“Uh...that isn’t French. Isn’t lapis lazuli a gemstone?”

“Indeed, and it is also the precise shade of your eyes in this moment. Please stay just there, as you are, indulge me--”

Hannibal darted across the room, which would have been pretty funny since he was still naked, but since he resembled a Greek God, Will was too busy staring at his broad, powerful back, his scrumptious ass, his long legs, et cetera, to even think of moving, not that he really had his own land legs back yet. Hannibal was still walking crooked too, which amused and pleased him. He was proud of rendering those elegant dancer’s legs wobbly and weak.

Hannibal sat on the rug in front of Will’s chair, another blanket loosely tossed over his legs, and started sketching on the pad he’d brought. They’d made love so long and hard that Hannibal still had a thin sheen of sweat all over his body, so Will knew without asking that the blanket was so the sketchpad didn’t dig into his lap.

Will glanced at his lover’s art supplies. Hannibal had a box of charcoal pencils, a smudging stick, and a tin of wax-based colored pencils fanned out in a vivid row of lacquered shades. The younger man felt a quiver of excited self-consciousness in realizing all of this preparation and focus was to do with him, capturing him on paper like pressing this memory between wax sheets, a butterfly trapped in time, preserved. Always accessible, never fully lost. The wistfulness of the act, and in Hannibal’s expression, haunted him.

“Wait, wait, what are you doing?” Will blushed, nibbling his lower lip. “I’m naked.”

“Yes.” Distracted by his sketching and intense looks back over at Will, Hannibal added quickly, pencil flitting deliberately over the sturdy ivory paper, “Are you cold?”

“No, does it *look* like I’m cold?”

Will glanced down at the semi he almost always seemed to have, even when not fully hard, around that human dose of viagra across from him sketching on the floor. Hannibal had him continually in a state of almost painful excitement that had become Will’s favorite masochism.

Hannibal made a funny noise with his nose like a laugh-snort and shook his head. “You still look quite virile, my dear.”

“Well, this isn’t much of a pose,” Will sulked.

He was casually sprawled on the chair, but didn’t dare shift into a more dignified posture because Hannibal had said to stay the way he was, and well...he didn’t want to ruin Hannibal’s plans when his lover looked so serious and intent.

“I’m nearly done,” Hannibal muttered, reaching for the brightest blue pencil, then a sage green and a gold, adding color hurriedly to key places. “I would not cause you discomfort by this impromptu posing for me.”

“I’m *not* posing,” Will sighed. “I look like a naked mess right now, I’m pretty sure.”

“Finished.” Hannibal nodded down at his work, looking distinctly unsatisfied but resigned. “Thank you, beloved, you were an exceptional model.”

He made to carry the sketch away, to put aside in one of his many drawers of secrets, but Will sat up straighter and reached out a hand.

“Can’t I see it?”

“I’m afraid my attempts to recreate your beauty fall pathetically short of the mark,” Hannibal fretted. However, he brought the portrait to Will and let him hold it for a few minutes of careful examination.

The Will in this sketch did not look like a ‘naked mess,’ far from it. He was lusciously relaxed, casting a vulnerable, lovestruck gaze upon the artist, and he had been drawn almost entirely in black and white, masterful shadowing employed in highlighting every curve of his face and body. The only exception to the monochromatic theme was Will’s eyes, shaded in lapis blue, feline gold and ivy green. It seemed the colors were dancing with light and life on the coldly inert page, and Will’s bashful smile, his lightly shaded cheeks showing how he blushed...the way Hannibal had drawn his *body,* it was kind of ridiculous. Will’s face flamed. He looked like an exquisitely sculpted specimen of male perfection, but all of his quirks were intact, the small round of his stomach when he sat, the scar on his shoulder, his disheveled sex hair…

Overwhelmed, embarrassed and honored, Will handed the portrait back to Hannibal. “Thank you, it’s...I almost feel like I don’t deserve how much you...I...thank you?”

Hannibal put a hand into Will's mussed curls and stroked back and forth with a sad smile. "It cannot come close to approximating your vivacity. I've never felt my artistic limitations in quite so profoundly humbling a light."

"It's important for you to try and keep me and these times together in your memory," Will ventured. He stood and wrapped his arms around Hannibal's waist. "But I'll always be with you, I promise. Don't worry. If we go down, we go down together. Believe me?"

"Life isn't so easy to plan and predict. If something should happen to you…" Hannibal shook his head.

"Don't get so caught up in worries that you can't be present with me. Come back, now, honey, please?" Will went up on his toes and kissed Hannibal's forehead.

"I'm here, Will." Hannibal's voice was tight, his eyes gleaming with unshed tears.

Will squeezed his hand. "Have you spoken to Dr. Du Maurier about these worries?"

"Not yet."

"It might not be such a bad idea to bring it up in session. You have that appointment with her later today...would you do that for me? I don't like to see you so upset."

He hugged Hannibal like a big, deadly Lithuanian teddy bear and sighed, kissing his chest, rubbing his back. Hannibal held him back as if Will was made of glass.

"I can do that for you, Will. For us."

"Good." Will looked up at him, using mischief to cut the tension and give Hannibal a break from the close scrutiny that sometimes made him anxious. "Want to play the game again, before I get dressed for work?"

He'd promised to go and meet with Jack Crawford at the Academy regarding the pressing cases. Although he had assumed he might be able to steal a few days worth of stalling before dealing with the complicated situation, Will didn't particularly mind Jack's quick follow-up. Better to get the loose ends squared away as soon as possible; then Hannibal could release Miriam and the rest of the dominoes would fall, sadly enough for poor, clueless Chilton.

"I suppose we have time for a few more rounds before we each must depart," Hannibal said with a wry smile. He saw directly through Will's ploys to cheer him up and gave in easily.

Was there anything his Daddy would deny him? Will had to wonder. He had a sneaking suspicion he could bring home five more stray dogs and Hannibal's only reaction would be mild annoyance and asking what their names were and if he should start a bath for them upstairs.

"Okay." Will shrugged on a blue terry bathrobe that he'd officially stolen from his lover, all over-large on him and smelling of expensive cologne, *wonderful,* and tossed Hannibal a maroon one. "You and me going to McDonald's once a month. 1, 2--"

“Will Graham.” Hannibal scowled hilariously while belting his robe.

“Hannibal Lecter.” Will tied his own robe as if it wasn’t going to hit the floor in about thirty seconds and stared him down. “I like McNuggets. With honey mustard sau--”

“Terrible boy.” Hannibal gave him this heartbreaking, tearfully enamored smirk and swept him right off his feet again, flinging him to the bed and climbing on top of him, holding Will’s wrists down beside his head on thoroughly rumpled sheets.

“You didn’t answer me,” Will giggled, wrapping his legs around Hannibal’s hips and merrily crossing his ankles in place where they belonged. “I’ll start the count again from the beginning -- 1, 2, 3, *yes*--”

“No,” Hannibal retorted, kissing Will’s mouth hotly, no suggestion of a chaste “see you later” peck but a clear prelude to both of them being late to their commitments.

“Yes, I need...need my Mcnuggets…” Will laughed as Hannibal’s rough new beard tickled and chafed at his neck where his lover kissed and bit, his obsessive attentions never fading with time, only growing more intense. “I need...fuck, Hannibal, yes…”

The doctor had rolled his hips, bringing their cocks together for a calculated stroke, and Will could really find it in him to wish Hannibal wasn’t so damn good at that if it was a little less spine-tingling, immediately lighting up his ever-eager erogenous zones like a jumbotron. His body had started to get so spoiled and used to the excessive pleasure, he didn’t have a prayer of escaping this without coming at least twice.

No, Will wasn’t about to complain.

Hannibal smirked again and let go of Will’s wrists, giving him a warning look not to move without permission. He kissed the younger man deeply, their tongues tangling delightedly, as if they had hours and hours of free time. This was too fucking good, how could they resist savoring every tiny nuance of each other, pulling every last gasp and moan from the other’s lips?

“We have to stop,” Will suggested, hands still obediently prone on the bed as Hannibal lifted his robe and groped hungrily at his ass, squeezing the pert cheeks and humming against Will’s neck. “Don’t give me that innocent look, you--”

Will’s voice broke off “You...oh, for fuck’s sake, Hannibal, don’t do that, we’ll be so late…”

“Mmmhmm,” Hannibal murmured, his tongue swirling around Will’s nipple as his confident hand parted Will’s cheeks and teased his entrance. “Yes.”

He bit delicately down on Will’s other hardened nipple and repeated with a wicked rumble in his voice, “Yes?”

Will’s fingers grabbed the sheets and held on tight as Hannibal opened his robe and kissed his stomach, his hot, wet mouth moving ever lower, fingers still circling his hole suggestively.

The profiler gasped while his hips bucked, soon stilled by his lover's firm hands. Will considered himself one hundred percent innocent of any blame in this time-stealing extra tryst, and eschewed all guilt accordingly as he whimpered wantonly, "*Yes,* Daddy, yes…"

Chapter End Notes

"If we go down then we go down forever" is a line from the Chainsmoker's song "Paris."

Hannibal's sweet nothings to Will in French:
"I love you with all of my heart"
"I want to be with you forever"
"I am in love"
"I love you...my treasure". 🥺

Next time: Will goes to work, dealing with Jack and Alana, and then seeking romantic advice from Team Sassy Science. And Hannibal goes to therapy...advanced apologies, Bedelia! 🍷 🍷 🍷

Fidelity

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Will, I don't want to overburden you with two cases at once, but I've got to have my best minds on both of these," Jack said, a compulsory apology somewhat nullified by the thick case files he had placed on the desk in front of Will like homework.

"I'm happy to do all I can to help," Will nodded. "I think we'd better prioritize the Ripper, though. At least the Vigilante targets terrible people, absolute villains from what you've told me so far. The Ripper could hurt innocents, and...I'm worried about Hannibal."

Before coming to Jack's office, Will had gone into the men's room and pinched both his cheeks in the mirror to look flushed with worry and stress. He squeezed saline into his eyes and let it leave them convincingly moist. Pretty convincing, if he did say so himself. He didn't even need make-up to show dark circles under his eyes; he looked genuinely exhausted, although the cause was all-night sex followed by another afternoon marathon of it. He bore every appearance of the frightened man thinking his beloved partner might be in mortal danger. As a nice little bonus, he liked to throw in some professional disappointment in himself at not having caught the Ripper yet, conveying himself as deeply angry and frustrated on the topic.

He looked very much forward to *capturing the Ripper* between his thighs again later, but that was a sweet secret designed only for two.

"I'm used to being targeted by killers, it's just part of the job," Will explained with a world-weary sigh. "But this is all new to Hannibal, and he's pretty upset. I don't want him put through hell looking over his shoulder for the Ripper, and I can't have him in harm's way. We need to catch the Ripper *now*."

Jack nodded, taking this all as seriously as Will intended. "That's what we're going to do, Will, promise you. I wouldn't put you out there if I couldn't keep you safe…"

In the chair next to Will in front of Jack's desk, Alana Bloom smothered a cynical, humorless laugh. Jack gave her a Look and she raised her eyebrows, silently reaffirming her belief that Will Graham wasn't stable and shouldn't be in the field.

Will glanced at Alana, careful to look perplexed by her attitude and definitely not smugly superior, laughing inwardly at her pathetic inability to ever figure him out. Embarrassing, really, to get so close to realizing what Will was, only to never be able to conclude or prove a damn thing.

Oh, Alana, Alana. Well-meaning, reasonably clever, annoyingly holier-than-thou Alana. Will would have no problem strangling her with the silky belt of her wrap dress if she didn't stop needling him with unprovable suspicions. Time, and Alana's own choices, would tell her fate. Dr. Bloom could just as easily prove an unknowing ally to his and Hannibal's cause, as a

comic foil or a future victim. Will let the trains in his mind chug along down these three separate tracks, not bothered as to the final result. Alana was already a being composed of so much insubstantial ephemera in the larger scheme of their glorious destiny, and Will most often found her presence droll at best, dull at worst. She was like fingernails filed down to the nubs still trying to scratch the chalkboard, producing nothing more than faint background noise.

“As I was saying,” Jack resumed sternly, “We’ll keep you safe while you catch the Ripper. And we’ll keep Hannibal safe.”

“Thank you, Jack,” Will acknowledged, his tone wan with emotion.

He did so enjoy being Jack’s precious protege while Alana dwindled in distant second position.

Will flipped the Ripper file open in his lap, admiring a color photo of the job Hannibal had done on Carter. So impressive, he really had scored in the love department…

“Funny how you said the Vigilante only goes after so-called villains,” said Alana coldly.

Will sat back in his chair and rubbed his chin, pressing his lips together as his eyes narrowed. Time to give her the old “self-righteous” routine which he had down to an art by now.

“If you want to say something, Dr. Bloom, how about you just come out with it. Your insinuations are somewhat exhausting at the moment. I’ve been designated the Ripper’s nemesis while my partner may be targeted as the next victim, so you’ll excuse me if I have little time for you questioning my motives.”

“Okay,” Alana agreed, pursing her mauve-colored lips. Her hands were neatly folded on her lap right where her red floral skirt ended and her slender legs were elegantly crossed.

Without flinching, but with an interesting mixture of careful loyalty and regret towards Will, she proceeded, “Villains only exist in fiction. We have no way of knowing the Vigilante will only target those whom you illegally and dismissively term *worthy* of being brutally murdered."

Will frowned, "shocked" by the accusation. "I never said we shouldn't pursue the Vigilante, only that the Ripper case is more pressing. Wouldn't you agree, based on statistics alone, that we're likelier to protect innocents that way?"

Alana sighed, looking slightly penitent of her aggression. "Look, Will, I know you're worried about Hannibal--"

Will's eyes widened. *Hannibal? Excuse me? Don't you mean Dr. Lecter?*

"...But it would be wrong to recommend that the Behavioral Crimes Unit devote more time and resources to one case when both killers have a near-equal number of previous victims and both are obviously going to continue killing. I'm concerned for Hannibal's safety as well--"

Oh, are you? Will let her keep spouting her sanctimonious b.s., but for once Alana had his attention.

"...But I think we need to be actively revamping both profiles, and have task forces assembled with equal focus on both. The Vigilante's never been more active than he has been in the last two months."

Despite his irritation at her familiar references to his lover, Will noticed that Alana seemed a bit guilty about this speech, even though she thought he had sociopathic qualities and probably shouldn't be in the field without further psychological evaluation and documentation of his fitness for duty. She must have placed more meaning on their fleeting quasi-friendship from the few cases they'd worked on than Will thought. A useful advantage. Alana was just trying to be fair and honest, not to specifically tamper with Will's career. Most conveniently of all, she blamed Jack for any potential wrongdoing on Will's part, since it was his supervisor who kept putting him front and center on the toughest serial killer cases.

"Maybe my eyes are clouded by Hannibal's proximity to danger, but I still see clear enough to know which one of these killers is most pressingly perilous at this juncture." Will sighed (this was like a sighing contest now, but he was going to win), pinched his brow as if ready to assent to Alana's suggestions, at least in part.

"It's understandable that you'd be intensely motivated to find the Ripper, and *I* can admit to using that to our mutual advantage," Jack allowed, sweeping his hand forward between Alana and Will, tying together what they had both said.

"Will is too close to the Ripper case," Alana stated flatly. "Point of fact. But I know you, Jack, and I realize you have no intention of taking him off the case when he's the best qualified to close it."

"You do know me, Dr. Bloom." Jack smiled, ironic, mildly irritated at the accurate call-out, and smoothly cordial all at once. "But as a matter of fact, I'd like to combine both of your perspectives to provide our best solution here. Will, I want you to go back to your profile on the Ripper. Go back through every detail you have compiled, every assumption, every photo and forensic fact. Come up with our next move. And Dr. Bloom, I'd like you to draw up a profile on the Vigilante. I'd be extremely grateful if you could have it on my desk soon as you can compile your findings based on what I've given you from my own investigation."

Alana nodded, mildly appeased. At least Jack wasn't going to rest on his laurels regarding the Vigilante; this showed he trusted her judgement. It was fair, and despite unconventional methods, plus a tendency to let Will Graham color outside the lines, Jack Crawford was nothing if not trustworthy and fair.

Outside Jack's office, Alana put a gentle hand on Will's arm. "How are you holding up?"

Will *sighed* and pressed his fingers to his closed eyes. "I'm okay. I just…" He let his lower lip wobble, knowing it was important to sabotage her suspicion of him being so cold and detached that he might be a sociopath or an egotistical psychopath in the making. "So worried about Hannibal. I need to keep him safe."

The small, delicate hand squeezed his arm as Alana's pretty face softened into sympathy.

Bingo.

"I know how special Hannibal is." Her voice, so knowing, took him by infuriating surprise. He had to force his hands to remain tensely by his sides unfisted, avoid slamming her against the wall by her throat.

"He was such a nurturing, caring mentor to me at Georgetown," Alana continued, "And we've remained close friends ever since."

Will regarded her in a whole new light, while keeping his features fastidiously locked in stress, appearing basically receptive to her pity and compliments about his partner.

Her eyes were crystal blue, her skin pale and creamy, her figure petite, appealing, dress sense lovely and stylish. He pictured her ten years ago, a plucky twenty-something fledgling psych student with the sophisticated, handsome Dr. Hannibal Lecter as her advisor. Late night consultations, perhaps...dwindling personal space and lingering glances?

The worst part was, he wouldn't be able to blame Alana for being attracted, even magnetically. He knew how irresistible Hannibal was, how completely unique in his many charms.

Alana smelled great, iris and orange blossom, a pricey perfume no doubt, something Hannibal would approve, or might buy as a gift if he was dating her. Spoiling Alana, instead of him. Will's jaw tightened and his fingers ached to strangle her. She was going on and on about how Hannibal trusted her insights on patients and wrote her the best letter of recommendation of her academic career, one that helped her advance in her post-graduate studies.

Hannibal had singled her out, it seemed. And she was still alive, which made her special. Very few people benefited from Dr. Lecter's particular notice and lived to tell the tale instead of ending up as dinner.

"He's, um, brilliant," Will managed to agree, keeping his tone friendly and soft, on the verge of breaking. "So wonderfully caring."

"Yes. I'm so happy you two found each other," Alana smiled. "I think your personalities are ideally matched. You can balance each other."

That might be truer than she could possibly imagine, but Will noticed how she tossed the kind words about his intimate relationship at him like a guilty afterthought. She'd never got over her infatuation with Hannibal, that was obvious.

Alana couldn't even talk about Dr. Lecter without her schoolgirl crush showing. And as for being *happy* Will had met Hannibal, ha. Will knew perfectly well she had wanted to sleep with both him and Hannibal at different points, and was a little disappointed at her failure to land either. With Will, Alana held back because he wasn't stable enough in her eyes, and with Hannibal, she'd simply missed out on the chance to get close while he was still single. This

regret was all buried underneath a genuine concern for Will's situation and Hannibal's safety, but it was *there,* and Will's vague dislike of her hardened into hatred on the spot.

Did they have an affair all those years ago, when Hannibal was her mentor?

Oh, God, if they had -- Will had to shove the thought away, make himself continue the day as he had carefully planned. Otherwise, he'd fall further into these conjectures and be unfit to be there at all.

"I have to head down to the lab," he said after a little more pointless conversation had passed with them discussing the Ripper case and his best next leads.

In conversing with Alana, Will had planted the seeds of suspicion he needed to as to Chilton's eventual emergence as the Ripper, knowing how to embed the concept in Alana's subconscious without her even realizing it. But while capably twisting her mind, Will would have preferred to bash it in with a brick.

He left her in the hall with a sadly resigned smile that made her think he was so innocent and distraught, poor Will, and nothing like the potential ticking time bomb she had once thought he might be. But Alana wasn't the only one whose perception of a person had undergone sea changes in a single hour-long meeting.

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"I think you need a break, Will." Beverly leaned across the table in the lab where Will had spent the last few hours poring over the forensic evidence from the last few Ripper murders. "You'll hurt your eyes staring at all this carnage...I know I do after a while."

Will smiled a reluctant assent. "You're right. A break will make me more clear-headed when I go back to working on this. And I think I've come to enough conclusions today to finish up, head home soon and check on Hannibal."

"Sure, well, what do you think?" Jimmy paused by the table where Will was sitting, which was covered in files and photos related to Ripper kills. "Any fresh insights?"

Brian whacked him on the shoulder. "He *said* he's tired and needs to take a break."

"I was just curious!" Jimmy shrugged.

Will laughed gently, mostly at how Price and Zeller reminded him of his parents sometimes.

"That's okay, Jimmy. I'm seeing some breadcrumbs that lead me pretty specifically to a man who's been working in medicine and psychiatry for many years without ever building the reputation he craved. This is a pathological narcissist with a bruised ego, and he's trying to tell us, he's *so* much more than his colleagues and patients ever gave him credit for. He deserves worship from the press, from the *world,* for his genius and power are legend. He...he's going to show us all."

Will gave his three friends a haunting smile, having allowed his voice to fall into a convincing approximation of the conceited, insufferable way Dr. Chilton talked. He sounded

uncannily like Chilton, and his FBI colleagues all knew of Will's talent for "hacking" killer's minds and taking on their personas so that his features and speech patterns seamlessly blended with theirs. More clues to make everyone suspect someone with Chilton's profile, getting ready for the big reveal which Miriam had in store.

He could see the hooks of understanding sinking into his friends' minds as he spoke, that none of them would be even slightly surprised when the notoriously ambitious, yet dangerously reckless BSHCI administrator was shown to be the Chesapeake Ripper. Will "decided" to compile a list of well-known braggarts among the area's medical community, tracking boastful published articles against quantifiable success rates in their care and reputations. And while the team approved this course of action, it was clear there was one obvious name right at the top of their lists. Chilton had published quite a few journal articles describing his supposed breakthroughs with patients that had complicated pathologies, and more than once the journals had later retracted some of his statements as unproved or faulty. He loved to be called in as a consultant on FBI cases, and whenever he did, he made a point of going on and on about his amazing accomplishments; everyone at Quantico was familiar with the man's eye-rolling, predictable habits.

All in all, despite his smoldering aggravation regarding Alana's apparent *feelings* for Hannibal, and the slightly tiring effort of keeping this complicated act and game in motion all afternoon and into the early evening hours, Will had to deem this a highly successful day at work.

He could relax a bit now, and agreed to have coffee with the forensics team in the Academy's cafe. The coffee bar was pleasant with its airy ambiance, the smooth dark wood counter where one could get pretty much any variation of coffee or tea, and the long table with its tall chairs where he and his colleagues sat in front of a large window facing the quad.

The night had fallen over the strangely tumultuous day which had carried Will from domestic bliss to flashes of anger and jealousy and now back to quietly accepting calm. He couldn't predict himself anymore than Hannibal could, or any better than one could know whether to expect early December Virginia-Maryland weather to be bitter cold or indecisively mild. The aggressive chill in the November air had slipped into a sublimely wistful prelude to the holidays, still seasonably cold but gentler somehow, a pill under time's tongue.

Through the window, over snowy hills with trainees trudging through soft snow piles, following the wide trails of predecessors' boots, the purpling twilight sky surrendered like a sleepy blink into star-dazzled onyx. It was lovely here, chatting fondly with his friends, quieting his nerves, remembering that he had places to belong and a dear lover waiting for him at home. He'd be there soon.

"How can you drink that, it smells like something we pulled off a morgue slab," Zeller accused Price as his partner stirred the green juice smoothie he had ordered.

"I'll have the last laugh when I reap the health benefits of a full serving of leafy greens while you choke down that black coffee that's only going to make you stay up all night with the jitters." Price smiled, resplendent in his superiority on this topic that made Brian groan and roll his eyes dramatically.

“Oh, like you mind me staying up late with a high energy level,” Brian countered.

“We’ll just have to see who has more stamina.” Jimmy shifted slightly so that Will could tell he had nudged Zeller’s knee with his own under the table, and they seemed to be holding hands, both slightly blushing now.

Beverly and Will laughed and she added bluntly, “Well, I’m not with either of you on the drink choices. I couldn't live without my 5pm iced vanilla macchiato wake-up call. How about you, Will?”

“Hmm?” Will glanced down at the berry hibiscus iced tea he had ordered because it was tasty and refreshing but healthy and it gave him a little boost to please Hannibal with his choices even when his lover wasn’t present. Their ongoing playful game involving his nutrition, veering from obedience to coy defiance, kept him amused and excited just like all of their other rituals.

“Oh, I used to get the macchiatos a lot, especially the caramel ones. I still get them sometimes, even though it drives Hannibal crazy.” He laughed, open-hearted and sentimental. “He’s so cute.”

He took a sip of cool, raspberry tea and grinned like a besotted schoolboy, cheek resting on his hand.

“Awww, remember when you used to look like that talking about me?” Jimmy teased Brian.

“No,” Brian retorted before feeding Jimmy a piece of the chocolate chip blondie he’d ordered.

“Soooo,” Beverly’s dark eyes sparkled as she grinned, “How are things going with you and Dr. Lecter?”

“Great,” Will shared, as just saying it aloud, even thinking about his happiness, took him by sweet surprise all over again. Talking about it made it so real, unlike all the other things he had to lie about. Those lies never seemed to matter, but he could never hide how much he loved Hannibal.

“So great it doesn’t seem fully real yet,” he admitted, “I’ve never been in a full-fledged *romance* before where the word ‘soulmate’ doesn’t sound like a lot of bullshit invented by greeting card companies.”

“You like living together?” Beverly added, taking a bite of her yogurt. “It’s so different from your whole-- rustic chic sort of life in Wolf Trap.”

“Rustic chic,” Will chuckled, “Hannibal would love that as a description of my aesthetic. I mean, I get the best of both worlds because I kept my house, for fishing and keeping some of my extra stuff, my boating projects, the artist one day to be known as Nola.”

He grinned as his friends recognized, from his many previous tangents, the name of the sailboat Will had been working on building for a year.

“You mean, you moved into Dr. Lecter’s quasi-mansion in bougie Baltimore elite territory, and you could still afford the mortgage on your sweet farmhouse?” Brian’s eyebrows shot up. “What are they paying you and did I get into the wrong area of crime investigation?”

“You as a profiler, I’d like to see that,” Jimmy snickered.

Zeller guffawed, “Yeah, well, just think, you could have been a goldfish conversationalist. Just so you all know, he pays more attention to Cate these days than me. ‘Is it time to change your water again, sweetie? Did you want a little more gourmet fish food, honey?’”

“You named the fish ‘Cate,’ after Cate Blanchett?” Will chuckled, amused to hear the continued saga of the goldfish who survived Carter Jackson’s murder. “This *is* serious.”

“One queen deserves to be named for another,” Jimmy said proudly. “Brian secretly loves Cate-fish. I caught him singing to her the other night, late, when he thought I was asleep.”

“I was *not,*” Brian insisted, still sitting almost in Jimmy’s lap. “You were having a weird dream.”

They had completely forgotten about Brian’s question to Will about how he afforded to keep his old house. Beverly, however, still wondered.

“Will, should you be giving money-saving advice on informercials, or what?”

“Uhum...Hannibal offered to buy my house outright and let me keep it just for my own enjoyment…” Will drummed his fingers on the table, just a little self-conscious as he had never really discussed this dimension of their relationship before. It was specific enough a pattern to be quite recognizable.

“*Did* he?” Beverly grinned, looking totally delighted for Will. She nodded coyly at his Emporio Armani dress shirt, perfectly fitted to his figure like his dark grey trousers.

The clothes felt so sumptuously indulgent against Will’s loved-up skin, the fabric hugging him close and showing off his body the way Hannibal liked. The white shirt with its plum gingham pattern was a suitable nod to Will’s habitual reliance on plaid, a shift from flannel to formality that still matched his personality while making him look debonair. He’d been turning more heads than ever as he walked the Academy halls in his dapper new attire lately.

“New suits all the time lately, and that gorgeous bracelet,” Beverly marveled. “Stop me if this is TMI, but...is there a sugar daddy vibe going on?”

“So you noticed.” Will huffed a laugh and blushed down at his almost empty plastic cup of iced tea. He tied his straw wrapper in a few knots and admitted, “Yeah, he does. Hannibal loves that, spoiling me, showing me off, bossing me around a little. I like to let him. Never knew I’d like it so much.”

“Your relationship is bringing out new sides of you, that’s…” Beverly sighed, looking envious. “Amazing, Will, I’m so glad for you both.”

“So you’re not judging me for allowing my lover to pamper me with excessive shopping trips and extravagant presents like, you know...a whole house?” Will was relieved, not that he’d been judging himself, but he didn’t want his friends to think he had become someone shallow.

He had heard enough people misunderstanding and casting petty judgements on relationship dynamics like those he and Hannibal had and exchanged, sugar daddy/baby, dom/sub (their roles an exhilarating revolving door in that sense), older/younger…

“Of course not,” Beverly laughed, incredulous he would even worry about her casting judgement like that. “Damn, I only wish Dr. Lecter had a brother or a sister, for that matter, for *me*!”

Will grinned and leaned into the side-hug Beverly gave him, then she asked with undiminished interest, “So, with how well things are going, are you planning to put a ring on that?”

His heart pounded faster as the idea which he’d been toying with since meeting Hannibal continued evolving from an insanely ambitious impossibility to a true hope. Hannibal, as his husband...the mere idea made Will feel high, bouncing on clouds, incredibly proud and possessive and *home.*

“I have. I have wanted that all along, even when it was much too soon.”

Will’s smile quirked in one corner as he went elsewhere in his mind’s eye, to the future, Christmas mornings, New Years Eves, birthdays and summer fireworks bursting, blood-soaked valentines carved and shaped from flesh and bone, decadent holidays and soft, quiet domesticity, sharing and building families, making a life for the rest of their days. He wanted it so much, it hurt in the most frightening, beautiful way. The yearning made him a whole person somehow.

“Maybe it’s time I got more serious about it,” he reflected. “Life is too short not to make the most of every second.”

“That’s right, go get him,” Beverly encouraged. “You’re an inspiration.”

“You’re a good friend, Bev,” Will answered warmly. “Thank you for listening and understanding.”

“*She’s* a good friend?” Jimmy interrupted, cluelessly returning to the conversation. “What about us?”

“I feel like chopped liver,” Brian added, his eyes twinkling with amusement.

“Oh, I could never neglect to acknowledge what appalling -- I mean outstanding friends you both are,” Will said with his hand on his heart, affecting sincerity while also genuinely feeling it.

If it weren't for Will, his forensic analyst friends might have found themselves in the Ripper's crosshairs, given their casual genius and insight into the case. Luckily, with Will looking out for them and guiding them onto a safer path of investigation, they never would end up as chopped liver.

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"I find myself...singularly concerned with the passage of time, its inevitability, my accompanying inability to fully possess any given occasion." Hannibal sat ramrod straight in his usual chair across from Bedelia in her bone and grey-colored home, an eerily delicate safe haven for his ever-insightful psychiatrist.

"Singularly concerned?" Bedelia prodded, flawlessly pristine as ever in a bronze shift dress and matching pumps, her ice-blonde hair framing her dainty face.

Hannibal sighed, annoyed but defeated by her refusal to accept his vague descriptions. After all, they were both well-aware therapy would not work without his full, trustful transparency. With the obvious exception of certain details regarding his murderous activities, which she understood enough of sans exposing any specifics, Hannibal must submit to the mild humiliation of honesty to benefit from her advice.

"Obsessed," he therefore admitted, brushing nonexistent lint from the knees of his black pinstriped suit. Giving up when he ran out of minuscule distractions, he met Bedelia's glacial gaze and opted again to ignore the subtle amusement he found there at his human predicament. "Paranoid, restlessly unable to find satisfying answers. Why must love be finite within the mortal realm, why must I content myself to letting go of each second in Will's presence, when for all I can glean of the future's grip, he could be taken from me by accident or other disaster?"

"Your partner has an inherently dangerous career. It's entirely understandable that you would be upset in considering his proximity to risk on a daily basis." Bedelia's words, crisply matter-of-fact, were on point yet somehow paled in comparison to Hannibal's deep upheaval on the subject.

"Will can look out for himself...I heartily pity anyone who should attempt to do him harm," Hannibal mused, his irritated features shifting into an adoring haze. The Will Effect. Even Bedelia was growing accustomed to the profiler's unheard-of power over the intimidating Dr. Lecter, he was sure.

"Yet you *are* upset. Enough so that Will has noticed and expressed concern for your turmoil. Beyond what he seems equipped to comfort."

"I'm not *upset,*" Hannibal insisted, adjusting his jacket cuffs, turning with care the gold-plated cufflinks and then curling his lip, licking it, metabolizing the uncomfortable truth of Dr. Du Maurier's observations.

His eyes flicked towards the ceiling in frustrated partial admittance of the weakness that had taken him over lately.

“It is not as though I have taken to researching various methods of time travel in the hope of one day rebelling against life’s temporal flow and taking back my lost time with Will,” he maintained with steely resistance to a full confession.

He had only filled three journals with research notes and formulas regarding the turning-back of time, in case he should ever lose Will. His fixation was far from getting out of hand, surely.

“Oh, well.” Bedelia smiled, and Hannibal thought she seemed to have swallowed a laugh. “So long as you have not transgressed that far into obsession where time, teacups, and Will Graham are concerned.”

Hannibal regretted that he had several times alluded in session to his long-held fantasy of repairing a shattered teacup through the sheer power of his will over destiny.

“If I *had,*” he ventured, glancing over at the large selection of well-curated wine behind the doors of Bedelia’s glass cabinet just behind him, longing for a very large glass of something strong, “If I had lost myself to the fear of losing Will, sank into a preemptive mourning for our love when in fact I may be able to enjoy it forever after, I cannot help but wonder if there is some measure I might undertake as antidote.”

“What do you see as the potential damage wrought by this problem?” Bedelia tilted her head to one side, her shiny hair swinging with the tiny preciseness of her movements.

Every nuance of her demeanor was crafted, under considerable anxiety and trauma, to keep her only patient happy and satisfied with her efforts to assist him. She knew that the consequences would be dire and swift should she cease to prove useful, or worse, more broadly offend him.

Appreciative of her wise choice to respect his power over her fate, Hannibal replied in a quiet, contemplative tone, “I can’t be with Will in the present if I am constantly worried about the many unknowable twists of the path that lays ahead.”

“Precisely,” Bedelia beamed, a rare flash of genuine warmth that immediately thereafter froze over.

Still, to be congratulated on preciseness by the most meticulous person he knew aside from himself...it bolstered Hannibal’s confidence. He let his walls down a little, about as much as he ever would to anyone but Will, who was already inside his memory palace, triumphant.

“What can I do?” He asked, pushing himself over the instinctual pain of admitting he did not know everything. “I would not wish to allow this complex to metastasize, ruining my ability to be a properly supportive lover.”

Bedelia was still on the outside of the veil, but she noticed his receptiveness to improvement here.

“I believe the resolution lies in your past, in the burden it has imprinted on your mind to remain stronger than anything else life may place in your way. By accepting your past

trauma, perhaps even sharing more of it with Will, you may find peace enough to work through this terror of losing him."

Hannibal wished she had said almost anything but that. To remove the many padlocks, triple encoded safeguards and wooden planks which he had long since nailed over the door of his childhood ordeals...this was nearly as formidable a task as admitting he was no match for the power of true love. But if Bedelia was right, to fully embrace this love with Will, he had to return to places inside his mind which scared him.

He had much to consider, including his own bravery, but he only hoped he would prove strong enough to confront even the most disturbing truths of a grotesquely bizarre life which had ultimately shaped him into the man Will loved.

For better, or for worse...

Hannibal cherished the rose-gauze-tinted fantasy of marrying Will one day, watching from the altar as his beloved walked towards him both confident and shy, exchanging rings and trembling vows...sweeping Will off on the most luxurious, marvelous honeymoon, knowing Will was his alone for life.

But how could he hope to be worthy or ready to be Will's husband, until he properly resolved the demons that might hold him back from giving Will the very best of himself? He felt unworthy of any such splendid privilege, at present.

Bedelia had remained politely quiet, noting that Hannibal had disappeared into a murky place of self-doubt and confusion, tangled in hope and fear.

However, after a few minutes of this had elapsed without Hannibal achieving any satisfactory decisions, Bedelia stood, smoothed her skirt, and strode to the liquor cabinet.

"Tonight, I think, a bourbon barrel-aged cabernet," she proposed, removing a jam-red bottle of fine wine.

"Thank you, Dr. Du Maurier," Hannibal replied with a glaze of sad bewilderment still clinging to his voice. "I thought you would never ask."

Chapter End Notes

Next time, well, hope you enjoy when Jealous!Will and Jealous!Hannibal collide...

I still get jealous

Chapter Notes

> cw: An instance of non-suicidal self harm. There's also a brief incident of complicated emotional knifeplay, but no one is badly injured.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will waved cordially to the bored-looking security detail agents in the black SUV behind him when he parked in the driveway of Dr. Du Maurier's remarkable home.

The place wasn't at all what he had expected. Instead of something palatial yet demure, in keeping with the way Hannibal had briefly described her personality, it was some kind of post-contemporary monstrosity, tall grey-brick pillars stuck to the sides of two big white octagons. Since Dr. Du Maurier had always been so helpful, according to Hannibal, Will decided not to judge her too harshly on a house he had to dub an eyesore.

He wanted a bit of fresh air without intruding on Hannibal finishing up his session, so he got out of the car and stood leaning against it, hands tucked in his black peacoat, collar popped, his eyes shading azure grey in the misty, snow-drifting evening. He'd slicked his thick curls back from his brow and adopted a ruggedly picturesque pose in anticipation of Hannibal coming out of the doctor's house and setting eyes on him. Will did like to look his best for his boyfriend...okay, he *loved* it, and riling up Hannibal's doting sex drive by teasing him with his outfit choices plus flirty looks was never going to get old.

"Will? I mean -- ahem, Agent Graham?" A polite male voice piped up out of nowhere.

Will glanced to his right, where in the driveway of the house next door to Dr. Du Maurier's, a yellow Jeep Wrangler had just been parked. And standing outside of it, looking at Will with cheerful recognition and a bit of nervousness, was Dr. Hawkins, the FBI therapist who had evaluated Will after he killed Garrett Jacob Hobbs.

Shit. Will looked from Dr. Hawkins' almost idiotically pleased-to-see him smile to Dr. Du Maurier's atrocious house. Well. He knew what happened next when a man gave him *that* look, and he really didn't need Hannibal to come outside and "catch" him letting a work acquaintance flirt with him.

At least he had the comfort of knowing Dr. Hawkins actually couldn't come right out and hit on him, since there was an obvious conflict of interest in their respective positions at work. Will might technically still be Hawkins' patient, actually, although he had "forgotten" to schedule his follow-up consultation.

"Hi, Dr. Hawkins," Will said with a friendly smile, slightly strained. He needed to get rid of this guy, ASAP, but he didn't have the heart to be mean. The therapist was a really nice

person...he just happened to have the unfortunate judgement to live next door to Hannibal Lecter's own psychiatrist. "What a coincidence!"

"Right?" Hawkins looked so delighted, he couldn't believe his luck, how wonderful.

Oh, boy.

With his greying beard, cute designer-frame glasses, corduroy pants and bright blue parka, Hawkins pulled off a certain grown and sexy look, comfortable in his own skin and naturally upbeat, that might once have appealed to Will. And he had just hopped out of his sporty jeep and right into seriously hot water, staring with admiration at the "sensuous pensive winter Will" look which the profiler had cultivated in order to knock *Hannibal's* socks off.

"So…" Hawkins rubbed a thumb to the side of his face and took a few shy steps in Will's direction, just a waist-high hedge between them. "I guess I shouldn't ask if you never booked your follow-up appointment with me because you became a patient of Dr. Du Maurier's instead."

"Oh." Will wondered if he should use that excuse, if the rudeness of that might get rid of Hawkins fast.

"Don't worry," Hawkins laughed. "I actually left my job at the FBI last month, joined another practice in Baltimore, specializing in pediatric neuropsychological evaluation. It's the work I've always wanted to be doing."

"Congratulations," Will said awkwardly, adding as an afterthought, "I'm actually not a patient of Dr. Du Maurier's, just waiting for one of her patients--"

Who I'm dating! Because I am not single!

But Hawkins, in his crush-blind enthusiasm, bulldozed over Will's intended explanation.

"That's so nice of you to give a friend a ride. Listen, Will -- mind if I call you Will?"

"Well, see, the thing is--"

"I've been thinking of calling you ever since I left the bureau." Hawkins shrugged, with that 'fuck-it-I'll-shoot-my-shot' smile which Will had seen on many a person's face turned in his direction. "I guess I never got up the nerve, but it seems so...kismet that you would be here, of all places…"

"I don't think so," Will said with a combined wince and chuckle, glancing nervously over at the door to Du Maurier's house and back at the doe eyes of his former therapist.

Hawkins blathered the rest out in an admirable, but ill-judged rush of bravery: "I really liked you, when we met earlier this past Fall, a lot. And I can't help but wonder, now that there's not technically any professional or patient-doctor faux pas involved...would you maybe want to grab a drink sometime?"

"I--"

“Good evening.”

Hannibal must have come up behind him while Will was trying to dissuade Hawkins from flirting, and happened to arrive right at the worst possible moment, when the naive therapist asked him out.

Will closed his eyes with the brief wish of the earth opening to swallow him up.

“Dr. Lecter, right?” Hawkins extended his hand across the hedge with a goofy grin. “Beckett Hawkins. So great to meet you in the flesh.”

Hannibal looked disdainfully down at Hawkins’ offered hand, then gave it the briefest of all clasps, along with a deadly glare.

“I don’t believe I’ve had the pleasure, Mr. Hawkins, yet you seem familiar with me.” Hannibal waited, with his crisp tone and stiff bearing, for some kind of reasonable explanation. But Will knew even this was merely a facet of his lover's impeccable manners, and Hannibal had already decided there *was* no such good excuse for what he'd walked in on.

“Dr. Hawkins, actually, I'm a psychiatrist as well. I’ve read your article in *Psychology Today*, the abridged version of your views on Social Exclusion, keep meaning to track down your original, full thesis. Fascinating stuff. Um, the magazine included a little photo of you at the top of the article?”

Belatedly, Hawkins had realized that Dr. Lecter’s narrowed eyes were boring into him with pure acid hate. He gulped, scratched his ear, seemed bereft of further small talk.

A pregnant pause ensued.

“I can send you a copy of the original, unabridged version,” Hannibal offered finally. “I suppose in order to do so, I will not need to ask for your home address. You live here?”

“We really should be going now, honey,” Will said through gritted teeth, slipping his arm through Hannibal’s and attempting to move him towards the car. It was like trying to casually lift a building from its foundation and he had to give up before he was slingshotted into the Bentley.

“I'd love to read the full article. Thanks, Dr. Lecter, how generous.” Hawkins had realized that Hannibal was Will’s lover and *finally* seemed to be attempting a recovery from his previous flirtations with the profiler. However, he seemed to be accepting Lecter's jealousy and resentment as those of a sane, ultimately sensible person. He remained relatively cheerful, adding, “Will and I know each other from the bureau, but I don’t work there anymore.”

“Would you look at the time!” Will put in, almost hyper.

“That is probably best for all concerned.” With his steely expression and broad, effortlessly menacing figure in that Burberry coat that made his shoulders look ginormous, Hannibal only got scarier-seeming when he laced his words with poisonous warning.

“Ha, um, I guess, it’s always better to chase your passion, I mean career-wise, and…”

“Hannibal, I’m hungry. Let’s go get some dinner,” Will urged, starting to get annoyed now. He didn’t deserve Hannibal’s suspicion that he enjoyed the attention from Hawkins, and Hawkins didn’t deserve to be marked for death.

“I highly recommend that you chase your passion in the romantic realm elsewhere,” Hannibal said to Hawkins with an absolutely terrifying variation of his classic “prelude to murder” scowl. “As Will’s *drinks* and evenings are spoken for.”

“Of *course,* Dr. Lecter.” Hawkins nodded so fast, Will thought his head might fall off, and even that would be less painful than what Hannibal probably had planned. “My mistake.”

“I should say so,” Hannibal replied with that horrifying cordiality that spelled certain doom.

“I’ll be in the car,” Will huffed, striding right for the Bentley and getting in on the passenger side. He stuck the keys in the ignition and twisted hard.

The engine purred, calm and perfect despite Will’s tempestuous mood. Hannibal gave poor Dr. Hawkins one more lethal smile and climbed into the driver’s seat, silently backing out of the driveway and beginning the journey home.

Hannibal remained eerily quiet for most of the drive while Will seethed beside him.

“That was unnecessarily dramatic,” Will finally accused when they were stopped at a red light close to home.

“My apologies. I thought you had told me you understood and embraced my jealous side.” Hannibal stared daggers into the road ahead as the light turned green and he drove slightly over the speed limit. “I distinctly remember how you made me feel safe and accepted with your promises of understanding and sharing the same possessive instincts regarding me.”

“That’s all still true,” Will complained, smacking his own forehead. “But it doesn’t give you a free pass to--”

“To feel disturbed and infuriated at the sight of you *smiling* and letting a good-looking man who you have never previously mentioned to me, but are clearly acquainted with, attempt to romance you? Can you not be left alone for five minutes before you collect yet another admirer?”

“Can *you*?” Will felt his face turning that special shade of *orange*-red it got when he was both guilty and bitterly resentful of having been made to feel guilty. “God, as if you don’t have your *admirers* lined up around the damn block. And I was only smiling at Dr. Hawkins because he’s a nice guy and I didn’t feel like being rude to him, okay?”

“A nice guy who has no reservations about attempting to seduce another man’s lover.”

“He didn’t know I was taken.”

“Why is that?”

Hannibal glanced at him, hurt and offended way beyond what the situation called for. Will knew he had to be upset about more than just this tiny non-infraction, but he was now mad enough himself to plunge deeper into the argument without stopping for more sensitive considerations.

“Believe it or not, I did mention you to him during the one session we had in October. Told him I was totally smitten with you, but I guess...I didn’t use your name. And he had no way of knowing if we ever officially got together, he was just checking if I happened to be single.”

“And you don’t happen to be single. Would you prefer to be?”

“*Hannibal.* I know you know that’s absurd. But you’re hurting me now.”

“I’m a sadist. So are you, if you recall.”

“And a masochist. Just like you. That’s why I know you’re hurting yourself by hurting me, because something else is bothering you, but rather than -- God forbid -- open up and *tell* me what’s up, you’re -- freaking out over some guy I barely know.”

“Freaking out. Over...some *guy* you barely know.” Hannibal pulled into their driveway and stopped the car a little short.

Will rolled his eyes at the childish fits of temper that simultaneously made a shiver of arousal run through him, involuntary and inevitable.

“How would you describe your conduct towards Franklyn and Tobias at the opera, William?”

William. Shit, he’s really mad at you.

“As…” Will slumped in his seat, cheeks turning scarlet because Hannibal had called him his full name *and* admonished him with a fair fucking point. “As freaking out over some guys you barely knew just because each of them, in their own way, wanted you.”

“The hypocrisy, while hardly surprising, is stunning.” Hannibal leaned across the seat, transparently scenting him, incapable of resisting the sweat-citrus spike of an angry Will. But he was still glowering down at Will from his moral high ground.

“You know what? Why not? Thought I was *full* of surprises and that was half of my charm. Wouldn’t want to disappoint you by being too well-behaved.”

“No danger of that.”

“What is that smell?” Will shifted towards Hannibal and inhaled close to his mouth, double-checking what he was almost certain he had just detected on his hot breath.

“Were you *drinking wine* at your therapy appointment?”

Hannibal pulled away and sighed, righteously indignant. “Dr. Du Maurier is an old friend. We often share a glass of wine after appointments.”

“Is that so.” Will undid his seatbelt with aggression that almost ended in whacking himself in the face with the buckle, then wrenched the car door open and stormed inside.

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In the SUV, Agents Ross and Liu finally looked entertained, watching the argument unfold as they munched on sandwiches and chips.

Hannibal paused in consternation when he exited the Bentley with ragged dignity and saw the security detail using his personal conflict as their evening television drama, but he had larger matters to deal with at present.

He comforted himself with the knowledge that the agents’ vehicle would reek of cheap “Italian grinders” soon due to their ill-selected cuisine, and followed Will into the house, closing the door behind him calmly.

Hannibal was not calm.

“Where have you fled to, Will?” He took off his coat, hung it properly on the rack, and tossed his keys on the side table in the front hall, sighing at the sight of Will’s own jacket and gloves which had been unceremoniously thrown on the floor.

“The study,” came Will’s muffled, accusing voice from down the hall. “I needed to check something.”

Hannibal entered the study to find Will standing by his desk, the profiler’s slim Macbook open as he stood scowling at whatever was displayed on the screen.

“I thought so,” Will fumed, pointing at the screen.

Hannibal rounded the desk and saw the large, glossy photo of Bedelia in all her prim, glamorous glory, the one that came up first on Google searches due to the interview conducted after she was attacked by her patient and bravely survived.

“Will,” Hannibal began rather weakly.

“*Dr. Lecter.*”

Dr. Lecter. You’ve really infuriated him now.

Will slammed the laptop shut, then poured himself a ridiculously generous amount of Hannibal’s most expensive fine brandy from the crystal decanter on the desk. He took a good, long sip, having filled the heavy tumbler right to the brim, then shot Hannibal a bitter look before charging away, the drink clutched in one hand.

Hannibal followed Will to the kitchen with a sinking heart. By now, he regretted his hasty loss of temper and wished the fight to be over. As bewitching as Will was when aggravated, still he did not want to risk real problems between them by prolonging his lover’s ire.

“That was a generous pour,” he said in a feeble attempt to change the subject.

“Well, I’ve got some catching up to do,” Will snapped.

He stood at the counter, opening a bag of pickle-flavored potato chips and pouring them messily into Hannibal’s nicest gold leaf porcelain serving bowl. “*My* drinks and evenings may be spoken for, but you’re free to keep me waiting outside in the cold while you imbibe what smells like a rich, fruity burgundy with the good Dr. Du Maurier-- who I have been *encouraging* you to consult about *our* problems, like an idiot. I never looked her up because I wanted to trust you, but deep down, I knew. She may be your 'old' friend, but she's definitely not old *or* dull, is she?”

“It was a cabernet, actually.” Hannibal hoped his soft tone and gentle, open bearing would show Will he was backing down.

“Your favorite. Even fucking worse,” Will groused, nibbling a chip and chasing it with more brandy.

He groaned and poured the chips back in the bag, rolling the top up and sticking a bag clip on it, flinging it to the top cabinet where, to Hannibal’s full knowledge, he’d been secreting junk food since moving in.

“That was an absolutely disgusting flavor combination,” Will sighed, chugging more brandy until his pretty cheeks were cherry red with a rush of quick inebriation.

Hannibal felt dizzily torn between arousing, distracting sensations, protective instincts tangled with anger at the provocative behavior. He had nearly forgotten how powerful an effect an angry Will had on him, but the more this went on, the more he found himself slightly reluctant to end the fight after all.

“I might have told you that those repulsive chips would pair poorly with Grand Marnier.”

Hannibal smirked darkly, standing on the other side of the island counter from Will, whose petulant scowl deepened, sending an attractive flush down his neck, where his top two shirt buttons were undone.

“You might have told me a lot of things, like that your *wine friend* Dr. Bedelia Du Maurier looks like a posh lingerie model!” Will pointed at Hannibal, which was especially rude and made Hannibal’s wakening cock twitch firmly in his trousers.

“Dr. Du Maurier and I have never been intimate.” Hannibal inhaled of Will again, sweet, sultry rage, now mingled with the vanilla-oak notes of the heavy liquor.

What with Hannibal’s besotted, awestruck expression, it was somewhat of a wonder to him that Will did not relent in his infuriated mood and notice that the older man was dying with the need to make love to no one else but him.

However, his lovely boy had by now gotten himself so riled up that it would take some time and raging before he would be fully perceptive of details.

“But you’ve *thought* about it.” Will took a slice of leftover black forest cake from the refrigerator, whipped the plastic wrap off the top and flicked it aside to the floor, then took a bite of the pre-dinner dessert in further defiance of his Daddy’s preferences.

“*That’s* evident,” he added with a mouth full of chocolate-cherry gâteau.

Hannibal felt the heat pressure rising inside him as his irritation was finally stoked by Will’s continued bitter naughtiness. Anger of his own returned to make him determined to provide proper discipline for this sassy outburst.

“I know you have rightfully earned a reputation for being a brilliant psychoanalytical profiler, Will, but you cannot actually read my mind.”

“Ha!” Will drained another quarter glass of golden brandy. “I don’t need to read your mind. You’re obvious.” He licked messy chocolate frosting from his tempting, liquor-kissed lips. “You only associate with pretty people. And it’s *annoying*. I’m *sick* of it.”

“You will make yourself truly sick if you intend to continue drinking that quickly.”

“That’s my problem,” Will grinned with sarcastic faux-amusement at Hannibal’s flustered state. “Are you denying that you’ve thought about *banging* your wine snob bra model *blonde*, fancy, super-accomplished, blonde--”

“You’ve said blonde.”

“Therapist?” Will finished his sentence, ignoring Hannibal’s remark. “You can’t deny it.”

“I don’t see why I should be required to.” Hannibal shrugged. “I had considered it several times, but that was before I met you. After we became close, the idea of intimacy with anyone else held no interest whatsoever.”

“Hmm. Okay, Dr. Charming, Dr. Perfect Know-it-All,” Will retorted, his Southern accent in full swing by now, desperately sexy, layering every saucy accusation with adorable, sweet sensuality that made Hannibal’s whole world seem to sway.

“You’re out of line, William.” Hannibal stole Will’s brandy glass and drank the rest of it down, returning his lover’s wrathful stare. “And lest we forget, you are still owed the spanking of your lifetime regarding Dr. Hawkins, and the way you neglected to mention that you had a handsome former therapist who salivates at the sight of you.”

“That’s outrageous. I didn’t even realize he had a thing for me.”

“A likely story.”

“Ugh! You just need to believe I’m this slutty, intentional flirt trying to lead people on and get you jealous. Does that make you feel better about your own total lack of boundaries and self-control?”

“I have self-control.” Hannibal wrapped his hands into fists and pressed them to the counter as he leaned, biceps flexing under his snugly fitting purple dress shirt. “Which is more than I

can say for you at present."

Will glanced at Hannibal's tensed arm muscles, then the fit of his waistcoat around his trim middle and broad upper body. The younger man wiped a bead of sweat from his upper lip.

"What about Alana Bloom?" Will flushed brighter and looked down at the counter.

Something about saying Alana's name had set off a different set of emotions and sent tears into the profiler's startlingly beautiful cerulean eyes. Hannibal did not quite know what to say.

"Did you two have an affair?" Will looked back up at Hannibal, then away again, at the cake on his plate. He threw it in the trash, plate included, and Hannibal was too confusedly distracted to care. "When you were her advisor at Georgetown, and she was a sweet-faced, nubile grad student who hung on your every brilliant word. Did you seduce her? Let her seduce you?"

"Will…" Hannibal's breath cut out on a note of sharp surprise. Will seemed not only angrily curious and demanding, but deeply wounded.

"Just answer the damn question. *Tell* me."

"No, we never had an affair." Hannibal stepped backwards when Will gave him a terrifying sneer. He realized that he had even raised his hands in a show of defeat, and blushed before lowering them. "We were never, ever intimate," he added belatedly.

"That's good for both of you."

"Why does my possible, *past* attraction to Alana Bloom bother you even more than a trifling interest in Bedelia Du Maurier?" Hannibal regarded Will with genuine bafflement that only hardened Will's miserable temper further.

"*Because.*" Will wiped at his wet eyes, clearly furious with himself for beginning to cry now. "She looks like me."

He tried to storm away again, but Hannibal caught him by the elbow. "And?"

"And you have had other pretty people before me, and at the same time as me, collected like trinkets on a shelf to entertain you. What's so special about me that means you won't get tired of me someday and find a new brunette with big blue eyes?"

Will was so vulnerable in this moment, but his suspicious, insecure words ignited a fresh wave of molten anger in Hannibal.

"How dare you?" The older man demanded, letting go of Will to pace the kitchen. "The egotistical posturing. Thinking me guilty of such flighty affections, as though I am a creature of superficial aesthetic habit, when you yourself are absolutely incapable of resisting *older men with silvering hair who are taller and more broadly muscular than you, with sophisticated taste and pronounced professional competence*?"

“Huh?” Will put his hands on his hips, then dropped them as his jaw went slack. “You mean because Dr. Hawkins has a few traits distantly in common with you--”

“*Distantly?*” Hannibal felt the nauseating jealousy rising like bile in his throat, twisting in his stomach. He wanted to viciously slaughter them all, anyone who had touched Will, and nearly wanted to tear Will to shreds for putting him through the knowledge of it.

He stroked his own newly bearded jaw and blinked back stinging tears. “Do I look even more like Hawkins or Carter now that I’ve grown a beard in accordance with your wishes, mylimasis?”

“*Don’t* you say mylimasis sarcastically when you’re mad at me, Hannibal.”

Will had never looked more heart-breakingly beautiful, his curls softly rumpled from his sulky posture in the car and subsequent raging, his gorgeous physique displayed to aching perfection by clothes which Hannibal had lovingly selected. That only made it worse.

“I don’t want you to look like anyone else--”

“You have a type, *that’s evident.*” Hannibal lavished his repetition of Will’s earlier wording with more sarcasm. “I went harder on Carter because he looked like me. I never tortured anyone so maliciously, or derived so little satisfaction. Did you let him make love to you?”

“*Months* before I met you?” Will threw his hands up. “He’s dead, you killed him, we ate him together because we agreed he’s in the past and you’re the only future that matters to me, so do you really need to know, Hannibal?”

“I’m a masochist, as you say. Yes. I need to know. I need to hurt to the maximum intensity possible in regard to this, or I fear I will never shuck off the continual dread of Knowing or not Knowing. He came to you in my presence and spoke to you with such intimate expectation. Had he kissed you, undone your clothing, put his hands on your bare body, been hard for you, been inside you?”

Will blinked helplessly at Hannibal. A tear slid down his face which had gone from beet red anger to white as a sheet. “Yes,” he admitted, “But Hannibal--”

Hannibal grabbed a heavy Rococo style vase from the counter, currently empty as the flowers most recently placed in it as a gift to Will had withered, needing to be followed up with a fresh bouquet soon. The extravagant porcelain vase, with its intricate design of the four elements as half-naked wood nymphs, had cost him 50,000 at auction. Hannibal had also fought tooth and nail for the beautiful piece against a competing bidder who nearly wrested it before he won out.

Now, he heaved the vase behind him through the window, which caused an enormous racket of shattering glass, sharp fragments of the window and broken porcelain showering in and out of the house, an explosion of chaos.

Hannibal stood there panting, hair falling across his sweaty brow, pure agony painting his features.

Will stared in shock, until his phone vibrated and the dogs started barking. “Great,” he muttered, making Hannibal feel humiliated, as if his feelings were so inconvenient to Will.

The agents in the SUV outside were concerned about the sudden projectile, of course, so Will sent a quick text to let them know everything was alright and the Ripper had not somehow slipped past their watch and broken into the house.

“The Ripper breaks his own house,” Will grumbled.

He got out the dogs’ food and poured it into their bowls, whistling to them that it was dinnertime, then carrying the seven bowls into the study over two trips, keeping his pets safe from Hannibal’s wild mood and the disaster of jagged glass and porcelain all over the floor under the gaping maw of the broken window.

Will then disappeared for about a half hour. Hannibal sank to the floor next to the broken glass, his back against the wall as he pridefully fought back tears of heartbroken despair. His body shook but he choked back the sobs, grasping a large piece of the shattered vase and letting it slice into his palm.

When Will returned home, Hannibal gradually realized his lover had taken the dogs for their post-dinner walk around the neighborhood, then put them to bed as usual in the study. The kitchen was dark, and Will’s footfalls approaching felt like a light he did not want to let in. Everything hurt, and nothing was to be trusted, least of all his own abominable weakness for that beautiful boy.

“That’s enough.” Will’s voice was sharp as flint when he arrived in the kitchen and flipped the light on.

When their eyes met, Hannibal realized that he had mistaken Will’s reaction to the vase incident for disdainful annoyance. Will’s eyes were burning with furious accusation and other, unreadable fires he did not understand but longed to be consumed by, to the death if necessary.

The profiler lunged for him suddenly, grabbing him by the collar and hoisting him painfully up to his feet before pinning him to the wall.

“What’s this?” Will examined his palm where blood oozed freely and then licked the wound with a long, savoring sweep of his broad, wet tongue.

Hannibal moaned as pleasure sang through his body with the angrily lustful gesture, proof Will still wanted him, so long as this wasn’t mockery…

“Did I *say* you could hurt yourself, Hannibal? Are you permitted to hurt yourself, or is that my job?” Will’s voice poured over Hannibal like the sweetest drug, softly menacing and so purely exquisite.

“It’s your job,” he whispered tightly.

“What is it going to take to get you to realize that it’s *you,* it’s you. You!”

Will kissed his mouth hard, then wrenched his shirt and vest open, licked his bloody hand again even more voraciously, got a knee between Hannibal's thighs and groaned at the hardness he found waiting.

"What will it take to make you realize the same?" Hannibal asked on bated breath. "Enough is never enough with you, Will. You see me in more pieces than that window or vase, and still you want more of me. You demand it."

"*Yes.*" Will reached down to the floor and brought up a shard of glass, which he pressed teasingly to Hannibal's throat.

He gasped at the way the older man instinctively stretched his neck towards the threat, and Hannibal closed his tear-reddened eyes as another thrum of helpless arousal coursed through him. He longed for the touch of Will's hand, his mouth, the soothing clutch of his hot, tight body around his cock, and he longed for the weapon in Will's grasp to cut him open, if that was what Will needed.

"Love. I warned you. I will. *Break you.*" Will dragged the tip of the glass shard down Hannibal's arm, barely breaking his skin and leaving a long, angry scratch mark before he let the makeshift blade drop to the floor. "Over and over and over, and enough will *never* be enough. You have to love that about me, or you can't love me. Understand?"

Hannibal nodded, enraptured by Will's brutal intensity. The younger man licked his cheek, sliding a confident open hand down his torso to grope at the bulge in his pants. Hannibal bucked into his touch and sighed, "Mylimasis."

"That's more like it. Don't you ever throw that word at me in anger again. I love you and you're mine, whether or not we're having some idiotic fight about other people neither of us want. *Are* you mine, Hannibal? All in."

"I'm yours, Will. I'm sorry that--"

"Don't want your sorry. I want your devotion, until you're drowning and begging me to push your head harder under the water. Why do you think Carter and Hawkins look like you?"

"I don't know. We don't have to talk about it anymore."

In a light, encouraging, no less haunting tone, Will said, "We're almost done."

He ran his hand with sloppy greed over Hannibal's face, a feral swiping pet of his beast. "Until the next time we lose our minds with jealousy. I really hate it, until I fucking love it. Same for you?"

"The same." Hannibal leaned forward and pressed apologetic, needy kisses all over Will's face. "Please, Will, break me."

"I can't, not tonight." Will gulped and pressed his groin to Hannibal's with a heated moan, his face buried now in the older man's neck as he kissed, too soft, too tender, painfully so.

“We need to resolve this,” Hannibal insisted throatily, keening at Will’s gentle touch while the younger man thumbed his fly open and eased his zipper down, then undid his own pants and let it all fall heedlessly down, pants around ankles, rock hard cocks brushing together in tantalizing flashes of almost-enough, not-enough.

Never enough.

“We’ll resolve this.” Will licked his hand and took both their cocks in a hot grip slick with precum and saliva. “Ahhhh, fuck.” He squeezed his eyes shut and shuddered with pleasure as Hannibal tossed his head back with a ragged gasp. “We’ll resolve this tomorrow. Right now, I need to make you come and I’m going to be kind, generous and *good* about it, so good, doesn’t baby know how to get you off, Daddy?”

“So good, Will, *God,*” Hannibal moaned, destroyed by the easily skilled way Will worked their cocks together, the strength of his long fingers and the perfect gliding strokes.

The stark, sinful dirtiness of their cocks sliding back and forth in Will’s hungry grip would have been quite enough to annihilate Hannibal’s senses with breathtaking pleasure, but then his voice, still Louisiana drowsy-deep, made it so much more intense.

“God?” Will sighed, still moaning as he worked them steadily towards a euphoric burst, “You don’t offer him credit too often. What brings this on?”

“Your...hand, your...ahhh-- Will -- yes, yes, aaahhh! Your beautiful, perfect hands, your voice, your eyes and lips, I love you...I need you.”

“Hell yes, you need me, and I’m going to make you feel so amazing you never forget it again and make, mmmmm, ahhh-- assumptions about me when I fucking *adore* you. Tell me how I taste.”

He leaned in, still stroking in a steadily building rhythm of long, firm moves, their aching lengths together feeling so divine, so right. He kissed Hannibal’s mouth, barely able to press his lips with the number of breathy, whimpering gasps that were growing wilder as his hand quickened.

“Chocolate...cherries…” Hannibal licked Will’s plush lips, kissed and sucked at his lower one, tasting again to his heart’s content. “Hmm, ahhh-- faster, more -- vanilla and tropical orange from the brandy...and blood, tangy and bittersweet.”

“Ever taste something better?”

“Your cum,” Hannibal answered instantly, surprising Will with his shamelessly profane reply.

Just as he had hoped, Will cried out with a whine of joy at the coarse words spoken in his lover's sophisticated, husky accent. Before Will, Hannibal never cared for dirty talk, but now he loved it, giving and receiving. “Will, you are always delicious," he sighed, "every inch of you.”

“Why -- why do I look like Alana?”

“Because I was looking for you.” Hannibal clasped Will’s face and kissed him, hotter, harder, desperate, thrusting his cock into his lover’s capable hold.

“Why did Carter look like you? Why did I feel some stupid, fleeting attraction to Hawkins -- mm, so good, fuck, aaah, Hannibal…” He returned Hannibal’s kisses, struggling to focus on what he was saying. The pleasure between them was neon bright, all-encompassing, getting so close now… “Before I immediately -- ooooh, kiss me again -- pushed it away and forgot all about him? *Ahh, fuck, again, again*. Why?”

“Carter looked like me....because you were looking for me." Hannibal could barely process thought, disintegrating as they kissed and moaned out their realizations between strokes and gasps. "Hawkins-- you liked because he reminded you of me in some small way.” The words came out as gravelly grunts.

“You *do* understand, when you let go enough. See me?” Will watched Hannibal watching him, pleasure-drunk and shivering. “To whom do I belong?”

“Me, you’re mine. Mine! God--Will--”

Hannibal blasphemed in a hoarse cry as they came so hard it hurt, their cum mixed together while Will stroked them through the waves of bliss, ably making use of the added lubrication the sticky-sweet release provided.

“*Fuck.*” Will trembled harshly. “Tomorrow, I want the animal. I want who Carter saw last, right before he lost his life feeling so grateful the pain was ending. I don’t want to have to envy him that anymore, seeing you unchained, my beautiful beast. I’ll run, and you’ll chase me. Make me your prey, then make me take what you choose to give me, let me beat my fists into you and scream, slam me down and *take* me, make me *believe* how you feel, don’t you ever dare question my feelings for you or try to hide from me behind your pride again.”

“Yes, yes, baby, yes.” Hannibal kissed him repeatedly, his face, his neck, his ears and nose, his precious soft, over-bitten lips. “It’s yours. I can hardly wait.”

“Ohhhh…” Will collapsed against Hannibal, finally letting go of their cocks after he had wrung every last drop of pleasure, letting his Ripper wind strong arms around him and rock him slowly, humming a lullaby, murmuring their favorite love poems.

“Tomorrow,” Hannibal smiled when they got into bed together and snuggled close in the dark, inseparable. “Tomorrow, my love.”

He kissed Will’s brow and let the younger man hold him fiercely, an unstoppable claim. On Hannibal's hand, a bandage was wound about his cut, but he could still feel Will's mouth searing into his open skin, and it was all he wanted, to be one, forget how to be two, lose his collection of sad paranoias in the process, the culmination, the essence of their joining a new Becoming. Signifying *everything.*

“Tomorrow," He smiled, "...and tomorrow.”

Chapter End Notes

Regarding the last line of the chapter, I was thinking about the speech in Macbeth,
"*To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow...*
Out, out, brief candle!
Life is but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
Signifying nothing."

Mainly because I feel that's Hannibal's big fear right now, that life will pass by so quickly that he won't be able to get a full enough grasp on his happiness with Will before it slips through his fingers (damn slippery life). And here, as Hannibal has more clearly than ever affirmed their love, he starts to think their bond proves that life, far from signifying nothing, could very well mean *everything,* justifying all the pain of the past and even the risk of losing each other (they live dangerously, after all).

Long explanation, but I was in my feels again 😄

I hope that you enjoyed the jealousy explosion! Next time, the sexy hunt is on with an invigorating game of, shall we say, grown-up hide and seek 😈🖤🔥

The backstory of Will's origins as a killer when he was a teen is still coming, but as I've written on, it's been moved later in the story and comes out in a way I think/hope will be much more intriguing than how I originally planned it.

Thanks for reading!!

What a heavenly way to die

Chapter Notes

cw: Role-play of physical assault and non-con, and some brief knife-play, but all fairly mild.

This chapter is basically a fluffy a-side to "Dark Horse," the alternate version of Chapter 16 which I posted yesterday. Similar emotional muscles are being worked between Will and Hannibal, with some resulting parallels.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You're mine and you know it
I'd still do it even if we were cursed
Won't you be my problem, it's okay with me if it hurts
-Banks, “Under the Table”

Will crouched and glanced around him with the instinctual prowess of a hunter, senses prickling at the noise of a branch snapped underfoot nearby. Someone, or something, set a slippery footprint down on a pile of snowy rain-dappled leaves nearby, and above Will, a gust of wind suddenly sent a pelting spray of cool rain shaken from naked black tree limbs.

He shook his curls out, dappling the cold, damp ground with water. Fingers dangling over his knees, ready for defense at any moment, Will scented out the air, attempting to discern if the mild racket had been caused by an animal, an unlikely random stranger, or the very specific individual currently sneaking through the woods, tracking him as prey. Hannibal might pounce now, or else it could be hours.

His senses were highly attuned, but not as acutely perceptive as Hannibal’s. He could not quite discern the aroma of anything beyond the fresh, clean snowfall over woodsy vanilla and smoky cold mystery. Hannibal would likely smell Will before the reverse ever had a chance to happen. He doubted he had a shot at the upper hand over the Chesapeake Ripper, but the game would be negated if he didn’t try his best, all the same.

Every noise, every shift of the environment around him sent a thrill of expectant suspense down his spine, electrifying and further awakening his senses, from hunter’s third eye to a lover’s arousal. He was an offering, scurrying artfully around what felt for all the world like vast landscape, but really enclosed him within Hannibal’s sights, as if he was trapped in a snowglobe.

Will’s heart pounded with fear-spiked excitement. This was going to be fun. He was almost sure this was going to be fun.

Running from one clearing to the next meant darting across the more exposed spaces between looming oak trees, old ones with skinny gnarled branches thinned and twisted by time, gothically pretty. Will moved with the sinuous stealth of a seasoned FBI field agent *and* a ruthless killer, a combination that had to be providing Hannibal a welcome challenge.

His clothes were soft, blue-grey henley beneath his warmest beige sweater, a pair of insulated tan hiking pants, which Hannibal once found in the closet and begged Will to dispose of for fear of eternally offending "the Gods of fashion." However cheesy the inner layer of red plaid flannel, they kept him very warm and made no noise when he moved. He had opted to pile on cozily protective garments instead of a coat that would only restrict his mobility.

Giving Agents Liu and Ross the slip for one evening was no big challenge. The daily shift change, when Agents Perry and Hollinghurst departed their thankless afternoon hours of watching apparently fuck-all happening at Hannibal's office and greeted their co-workers with mind-numbing chit-chat, left the ideal opening for escape. All four agents, though normally capable enough, were useless put up against Will and Hannibal, and the murderous lovers were gone long before anyone noticed.

Will chose this part of the immense forest sweep in Wolf Trap quite specifically. The area was too isolated for anyone to hear his imminent screams and come running to help, and free enough of the more dangerous wildlife that they didn't have to worry about the *actual* wolves interrupting their game of naughty, perilous hide and go seek.

He'd killed here before, several times, without consequence. It was a perfect place for burying secrets under a wide, encompassing full moon which cast no judgement, but seemed rather to encourage the feral heat in the hunt, the blurred line between man and what Will became when rage pushed him over the edge inside himself. When the time came to howl, this eerie, chillingly lovely, snow-misting wasteland beckoned.

With a smirk as he pressed his back against a tree and scanned the woods for Hannibal's shadowy figure, Will thought that prior to their arrival, the most dangerous thing here was the odd squirrel or swooping crow braving the cold in search of bits of nuts, leaves and winter berries which less hardy animals would miss out on in their hibernations and off on Florida vacations.

After forty minutes had seeped into the snow slush and dripped lazily down the frozen stream, the crystalline peace of the haunted night shattered, *almost* abruptly.

One half choked-out breath and a stuttering heartbeat before Hannibal had a hand slammed over his mouth and an elbow crushing into his chest, pinning him tight to the rough tree bark, Will felt his presence like a twinge of fond, scary familiarity. It tugged in his stomach with a warm swoop of arousal, and Will moved to bolt away, one second too late.

Hannibal, obviously Hannibal in form, was entirely unrecognizable as to feature, an alternate universe version of his ever-so-elegant lover, gracious, courteous, even a man who could be softly needy when Will topped him. Even the one who wept when his lover edged him and bought his boy excessive gifts every day, woke at the crack of dawn to make sure Will ate a solid, healthy breakfast, fussed over his well-being and happiness as no one ever had.

There was nothing now but the hunter: fierce, blank, savagery written all over Hannibal's face. Instead of the eloquent European paragon of fashionable good taste, always with a naughty glimmer in sweet brown eyes and a gentle, mischievous smile for his precious Will, this was a blood-curdling monster. Staccato flashes of Will's recurring nightmarish fantasy, Hannibal as the wicked black stag, gutted his senses with terrified ecstasy while his lover gave him a sickening grin. His eyes were polished onyx, cheekbones sharp as knives, plush lips pulled back revealing deadly fangs that hungered, as Will well knew, for *human* flesh.

Hannibal, the connoisseur, mustn't he crave Will's taste most of all? The profiler knew that Hannibal must have considered eating him many times in the early phases of their love, when he was still half-inclined to kill the one he adored instead of collapsing into the undiscovered country of devotion, from whence no traveler returns. He must still occasionally nourish his vivid imagination with the dream of consuming Will, lapping up gushing blood from a knife he embedded in that place on Will's belly that he seemed obsessed with, a fixated kink for soft, tender skin, or eating the brain which so fascinated and enthralled him with all its unpredictable, brilliant nuances.

Did Will really know Hannibal wouldn't snap one day during a misunderstanding and *do* it, remove him as a threat to his emotional safety, memorialize him through the only sacrament he had cherished prior to their love -- that of the richly ceremonial, taboo banquet? Part of him was honored by the thought, prized the knowledge that whether or not Hannibal ever enacted the ritual, he would never yearn to eat anyone else with the feverishly insatiable way his mouth watered for Will.

However, another instinct in Will, the all-too-human element of fight or flight, self-fucking-preservation, keened in pain at Hannibal's rough attack, pushed back with fast, strong hands, shoving at his lover's broad shoulders. It made his blood run hot and cold, longing to be a present laid out on the table of Hannibal's obsession, leaning into the wound of their love, and wanting to run until his lungs screamed and his legs gave out rather than submit to the pain of the Ripper's vicious blade.

Those hands, with the moonlight lovingly painting the bulging veins in white glow against the magic-seeming swirl of crystal snow, the dark specters of the towering trees with their canopy of bare, beautifully deformed branches, merciless. Those hands seemed suddenly *immense,* capable of plunging right through Will's chest to tear out his heart and eat it. Savor the still-warm flesh and oozing blood while the light dimmed in blue eyes dilated in rapturous agony. Deep, red life's essence would smear down Hannibal's gorgeous, feral face like pomegranate juice, dropping onto the snow. Crimson paint on the canvas of their souls, a rebellion against the moral underpinnings of society that never held them, the concept of love as something soft and safe, all of that rejected, disproved. Proof positive that no love could be so vivid as the killing kind. Was *that* why they were here?

Will's fast, panicked thoughts skidded past the common sense reminder, *it's just a game, you established rules and limits, you have a safeword, and you both need this. He needs this, needs me…* Because what did Hannibal need most of all? To have and to hold, or to rip and destroy? When your lover believed both could be one and the same, you walked a treacherous path.

He hadn't counted on this adrenaline shooting electric waves of fear and self-protecting instinct through his body, heart beating too fast as Hannibal inhaled of him deeply, eyes closed for a moment of joyous palating of his prey, and reached into his coat pocket, drawing out his knife --

"No!" Will screamed, stomping on Hannibal's foot, pushing him away with all his might -- the fuel of fear made him twice as strong, and the Ripper stumbled back long enough for Will to *run*.

"You can't hide from me, Will," Hannibal called, only a little breathless from the fall backwards into the snow crush.

The truly awful thing was, even when Will ran at full speed, Hannibal *walked,* slow, steady, intent. Will ran so hard that the forest flew by his peripheral view like a movie on fast-forward, surreal, unfocusing, his heart open, closed, open, closed, his blood burning blissful horror, blazing thoughts pouring over his mind, *Hannibal, Hannibal, Hannibal, my love…*

...And Hannibal walked in a deliberate, unhurried way in his exact direction, as if he knew something Will didn't. Will bumped into a tree, making the mistake of looking back and seeing Hannibal getting a bit closer, imposing and sure-moving as a pagan God of the hunt, and swore as pain seared through his arm and shoulder. He pushed on, trying to go in weird directions and avoid being caught again, but he lost track of where he was going, right at the same time he realized he let himself lose track. He knew these woods, but he wanted Hannibal to do what he would, take what he needed,

So when Hannibal appeared in front of him as Will half-ran, half-slid down the next hill, the profiler let out a genuinely frightened mewl, then tripped on purpose.

The Ripper was on top of him before Will could summon another broken breath, big body shoving him into the cold snow, cruel lips smirking as Will cried out in pain at the impact of the hard ground to his low back. The snow, while softening the fall slightly, also soaked right through the back of his sweater, sealing the henley to his skin. He shuddered at the freezing intrusion against his tender flesh, the colder malevolence in Hannibal's hard eyes, the glimmer of his curved knife held high in the moonlight. Hannibal's knee was pressed to Will's stomach, almost effortlessly keeping him down; Will genuinely couldn't escape now if he wanted to, and fear painted him in shades and contortions that changed his lover in return.

"So beautiful," Hannibal cooed, the words dripped in threatening, sadistic admiration, "Beautiful lost boy. Why did you come here? Is this not what you wanted? To end it all, let me make it quiet? So many voices in your head...they can all go away." He caressed Will's face, dragging the knife's edge down Will's sternum, savoring every breathy moan he evoked.

He was playing Will again, his favorite instrument, weaving a new melody through the air that bound them, a pitch-black ode to the love hunt, no less lovely than all his other compositions pressed with kisses, bites and scratches, culling whimpers and gasps and collecting them to fill his memory palace forever.

“Sweet love.” Hannibal cocked his head to one side, licking his lips as he used the knife to cut surgically through Will’s sweater.

As the soft fabric gave under the lethal blade, Will forced himself to hold still, but his whole body tried to quiver, a perilous natural response to clear threat and pulsing, building erotic fascination.

“Any last words, before I savor you as the incomparable delicacy you are, take all your radiance to fill my belly with light?” Hannibal’s voice was lush with decadently violent desire. “It will be the height of my mortal existence, you should know. Nothing else I do will ever come close to having you in the deepest sense possible.”

“N-no, no, no, no, stop, please,” Will blurted in staggering moans, getting hard when Hannibal teased his face with the knife, barely grazing his uplifted pink cheeks, not enough to scratch, just enough to make terror flood Will’s system, sure as the ache of his erection pressed urgently to his pants, a visible line.

“No” was not the safeword, and nor was “stop.” Of course.

Hannibal set the knife aside thoughtfully. He was dressed all in black, much more casually than usual, loose long-sleeved shirt hanging from his powerful frame, plain trousers designed for blending into the night. Hair loose, too, kissing his brow, silver highlighted by the stars and moon.

But rather than letting himself be transfixed by the sight of his stunning beast, Will took advantage of Hannibal’s fleetingly vulnerable position. He grabbed Hannibal by his shirt and flung himself up and over with a burst of determined energy -- he wasn’t a killer to be fucked with either, and he could hold his own in a fight. Will tumbled them to the ground, him on top now, and wrapped his hand around Hannibal’s throat. He felt the hard nudge of Hannibal’s thick erection under his own cock and fought a dizzying need to grind. Hannibal read his face smugly, wrenched Will’s grip from his neck and bit his hand, viciously.

Will screamed as blood dribbled from the indentations of Hannibal’s teeth in the soft place between his thumb and index finger. He slapped Hannibal’s face, leaving a streak of blood, then lay bodily over him, so *good,* warm amidst the cold, precum dripping from Will’s cock now, dampening the front of his underwear, blurring his vision, but he held Hannibal down and insisted hoarsely, “Stay fucking *down* while I call Jack. It’s over, Hannibal, you have to pay for your crimes.”

He got Hannibal’s knife, made to use it to threaten the Ripper and keep him down, but while he was reaching, his lover managed to flip them again, so that they lay panting, Will writhing under Hannibal, who licked as much of Will’s blood as he could reach with his tongue at the corner of his mouth where a drop had fallen.

“Let me *go!*” Will cried desperately, pounding Hannibal’s massive-feeling chest with his fists, wriggling his legs where they were trapped under the older man’s, “I’m not yours! You can’t have me!”

“I’ll have you, here and now,” Hannibal said huskily, delighted, batting Will’s fists away with perfectly coordinated reciprocal jabs of his hands and arms, and it was fucking *cold* and creepy out here, Will’s lungs were killing him from running, his heart hurt from beating too fast, back ached and all his dick cared about was Hannibal’s. He couldn’t see straight anymore.

“No, no, stop, you can’t,” Will begged, exhilarated, shaking with pain, arousal, fear, everything mixed together, everything sublime.

Hannibal stopped, actually stopped for a second and looked down at him in pained confusion. Will had touched on a nerve, his lover’s insecurity about whether Will would abandon him one day. While Will wasn’t quite sure where the fear came from, it felt very old and fragile, childish. He knew he must take care of this fear, massage it in his hands, kiss it and heal it slowly over time.

“Yes,” he smiled tenderly, “My beast, my ravenstag, you’re the beat of my heart. You can have me, any time and any place, including here and now.”

The role-play had dissolved, and Hannibal fell on Will with desperate kisses, devouring his lips with fiery passion, hot, open-mouthed kisses searing down Will’s neck. Will gasped in purest joy, slipped his hand under Hannibal’s sweater and rubbed, scratched and clutched at his smooth back, then in a blurring rush Hannibal’s hand was up under Will’s henley, feeling up his chest, making Will’s hips rise and fall in eager search of friction to satisfy the rising pleasure which the older man drew out of him.

A flood of crows scattered across the sky overhead, stars shimmering, visions of heaven and nature twisting and writhing in flashes caught between fluttering eyes falling further into erotic rapture, and Will’s hips kept twisting and writhing, his nipples lapped and nipped in Hannibal’s exquisite connoisseur mouth, Hannibal’s burning lips laying wet, sloppy siege to his belly, Will’s trembling hands fumbling with the older man’s trousers, grabbing at the button, losing patience -- too complicated -- Hannibal yanked Will’s pants down to his thighs and, and his tongue, dripping and slick, circling the leaking tip of Will’s cock, swallowing him down, grasping Will’s ass tightly when the profiler’s entire lower body arched into his intense consuming. His dick brushed the back of Hannibal’s throat, and Will arched higher, whining in euphoric torment. The bite wound in his hand throbbed, leaving red trails all over Hannibal as he desperately grabbed at warm, smooth skin and hard muscle. Hannibal pulled his mouth off and hit his elbows on the frigid, snow-wet ground. Both of them streaked in dirty blood, soaked in melting snow, but sweating with the thrill of the game, the emotional tumult of its breaking point.

Will didn’t know anything beyond Hannibal’s big, strong hand now stroking his aching length, slow and firm, thumb rubbing expertly over the head, gathering more precum to smooth the already perfect glide. He was sure he was still moaning, babbling something about “*God, please, Hannibal, don’t stop*,” which only made Hannibal love him harder, more excessive in his obsessive worship, spitting on Will’s entrance, licking it, the rim already lubed and relaxed because of course Will wanted to be ready. Rugged, killer’s hand sliding up and down his cock, gourmet tongue laving over his hole like the most delicious treat of all, scratchy beard rubbing his sensitive skin, Hannibal pouring hot breath and praise all over

him, groping and squeezing his ass, spanking -- Will came with a shocked cry which went louder and higher as Hannibal first sucked him rough, wet and fast, swallowing every drop of extra release he commanded, then folded Will's legs back just as fast, pressing his warm, thick cock directly into Will's tight body to the hilt.

"Fuck, fuck! Hann--Hahhh---hnnggggghhh, oh-my-*god*--" Will's head flew back and slammed into the snow, sending sprays of it cascading as the cold kept eating into his skull through his wildly disheveled curls.

Hannibal must have brought extra lube for himself, because he went in easy and fast, and Will hadn't recovered from the orgasmic bliss, so it hit him even harder. His prostate blossomed with new pleasure when Hannibal pushed as deep as he could go, then rolled his hips, making Will feel the maximum penetration and shocking fullness to the utmost extent possible -- then kissed him like a soulmate, like a bridegroom saying thank you for the rest of their lives together, no mistaking the absolute love letters on Hannibal's lips, warmly caressing over Will's mouth, thumbs stroking his quivering legs, where at some point he'd shoved Will's pants all the way off, Will couldn't remotely fathom when -- how --

How Hannibal kissed him and tugged affectionately at yet another thin, clingy henley torn asunder by his lustful appreciation for this fit and fabric of shirt on Will's body, fucking Will with long, slow, hard thrusts and murmuring to him, voice hoarse over shallow, quickening breaths, "*Je suis accro à toi....Je t'ai dans la peau...Tu fais battre mon cœur...*"

Colors, sensations of hot and cold, emotional extremes ran through Will at the speed of light, and Hannibal's silver beard burned sweetly against his blushing face. The Ripper's deep, manly voice was undone by feeling, more praise falling from his lips direct from his soul, couched in whispery, pleasure-broken, sophisticated French. *God, God, God…* Will never had anyone who could get him *this* fucking hard and wet on a regular basis. It was insane. It was like the sex that annoying, smug people bragged about to their friends but no one really believed actually existed. Will was losing his goddamn mind over this man, *again.*

"Let me ride you, Daddy," Will pleaded, still clinging with his hands under Hannibal's shirt, nails scoring his back, legs hitched up almost as high around his lover. His voice sounded very far away but certain, too. He needed to show Hannibal his own adoration in equal measure.

Hannibal flipped them, cradling Will in a fluid motion and then lying with a besotted, lop-sided, blissed-out smile, reaching to help guide Will when the younger man leaned over him and grasped his cock, pressing it into himself, groaning in immediate euphoria.

"You're the only one I'll -- ever want," Will promised, sinking down and enveloping Hannibal. He shoved Hannibal's sweater up and groped his pectorals, roved his fingers through the crispy soft hair, rode him fast and hard with the laser-focused desire to make his Daddy come good and hard finally breaking through his thick lust haze. "My body is yours, my life is in your hands -- do anything you want to me -- I'll take it -- would never reject you, I'd die first -- yes -- feel you getting close, give it to me, it's mine, you're mine -- you know it now, yes?"

Will's exultations were gritty with overpowering pleasure while he let Hannibal grasp his ass and fuck up into him at a brutal, sweetly punishing rate, but he didn't expect to come again himself until suddenly he was spilling all over Hannibal's cute, hairy belly, mouth falling open at the realization that hit him, along with a tsunami of ecstasy tinging all over his body --

That like an evil sex mastermind, Hannibal had pummeled his prostate with devastatingly divine pressure right when he knew he was about to come himself -- so that the older man's release coated Will's clenching walls at the same time Will's untouched cock painted Hannibal in sticky white seed.

Pleased as punch to have made Will come a second time, smug at shocking his boy with the simultaneous orgasms, Hannibal lay back, contented in the snow as he might have looked lounging on a sunny beach. His arms were stretched above his head, hair delightfully messy, face flushed with afterglow, and he was sweaty, snow-drenched, sweater still hitched up to the top of his chest with Will's hands planted hard to his pecs. Will finally came back to himself with an aching, blushing, oversexed laugh of disbelief, belatedly understanding there were tears streaming down his face.

"My beauty," Hannibal praised huskily, stroking Will's face with the back of his hand, letting the younger man nuzzle into his touch. He lost his bravery and switched back to French, incapable however of not saying, "*Tu es l'amour de ma vie.*"

Even if only he understood it, Hannibal needed to let it out, and Will loved that. But there was something he needed to tell his lover in return.

"I hope you're happy," Hannibal said with a throaty laugh into Will's neck once the profiler had fallen against his Daddy with a huge, crushing hug.

Hannibal wrapped his arms around Will, rubbed his back, tousled his snow-damp, sweat-tossed curls, massaged his ass cheeks in slow, comforting circles.

"*Very* happy, thank you for asking." Will brought his head up from its exhausted hiding place in Hannibal's neck and grinned, mischievous and tender in equal measure.

"Hmm. Demanding, insatiable boy." Hannibal chuckled.

"Needy, pushy, wonderful Daddy." Will clasped his face and kissed all over it. "Don't you know that I'll love you no matter what, at your ugliest, your most annoying, when you lecture me--"

"You love when I lecture you," Hannibal teased, tracing Will's shoulder blades, then his spine, memorizing him yet again, a nervous but happy habit.

Will laughed, slid off Hannibal's body and onto his side, tugging Hannibal around to face him in a face-to-face snuggle. They had melted the snow beneath them, a fact both convenient and hilarious.

“Even if you get sick, and you’re disgusting, sneezing and throwing up and fussing because every doctor is an awful brat of a patient--”

“I never get sick.”

“See what I mean? And *even* if you eat too much people souffle and get a terrible belly-ache, I’ll cuddle you and rub your tummy until you’re better.”

“People souffle. I have yet to try that recipe, but you are giving me new ideas.”

Will snorted, kneeing Hannibal’s leg before flinging his own over the older man’s thigh. He smoothed a hand over his lover’s shoulder and added more seriously, “Even if you track down and kill every person who’s ever flirted with me, if you say stupid things and hurt both our feelings, if you never one hundred percent believe how much I need you, or that I’m never leaving your side, it won’t matter. I’ll still--”

Hannibal kissed his mouth with reviving passion, and Will giggled, “Jesus, I’m trying to talk, this is important -- shit, cut that out, Hannibal, I’m cold and tired, *ohhh,* that’s nice...hmmm…”

They made out, slow and lazy, for a few more minutes, mapping each other’s mouths with hotly roving tongues, biting and sucking, then Will insistently muttered, “I’ll still love you.”

“You did insist on finishing that sentence,” Hannibal huffed.

“You do insist on doubting I’m real.” Will pinched his arm; Hannibal scowled and tugged his hair. “See, real?”

“Tonight meant a great deal to me,” Hannibal confessed, his smile fading along with his wandering eye contact. This was what he’d tried to kiss his way around saying out loud, in English, directly. “I needed to know you could see me as the beast and embrace that darkness.”

“You already knew,” Will shrugged, fingers stroking over Hannibal’s collarbones, then tipping up his face before his eyes ran away again. “You needed to feel it. Something made you stop believing in fairy tales. Now that you’re in the middle of one, I think you don’t quite know where to go or what to do.”

“I sense there’s a ‘but’ coming,” said Hannibal, reluctantly allowing his deep, cinnamon-brown gaze to land on Will’s searching cobalt one.

“*But* this Beauty was always meant to fall in love with his Beast. You’ll see. I’ll keep showing you; it’s not like I’ll ever get tired of it.”

“Truly?” Hannibal was incredulous. He pressed his lips together, considering, then added, “I should think that constantly validating an insecure lover might become exhausting over time.”

“Oh, you’ll see. Stick with me, that’s all I’m really asking. As long as you never lose faith in us enough to run again, I’ll love you all better day and night. How could anything make me

happier?"

"Has a couple ever been this intent on spoiling one another?" Hannibal brushed away tears caused by Will's sweet words, and Will kissed the adorable, salt-moistened crinkles beside his eyes.

"Nope. I do have one more confession, though. I hope you don't get mad…"

"Whatever can it be?"

Will stroked Hannibal's beard-bristly jaw and brought him closer for another soft, wet kiss. Then he murmured silkily, "*Tu es un beau parleur! J'en pince pour toi. Prends-moi dans tes bras.*"

His pronunciation was flawless, drenched in Southern drawl.

Hannibal pulled Will into a snug embrace, groaning in aggravated mortification as Will giggled, rubbing his face against the older man's firm, hairy chest.

"I'm from the *Bayou,* Hannibal, how did you think I didn't speak French?"

"I did not realize...that means that this entire time...you've understood the things I've said…"

"Well, I didn't want you to *stop.* If it makes you feel any better, you can switch to Lithuanian from now on, when you want to say something that makes you feel shy."

"You'll just teach yourself Lithuanian, then," Hannibal pouted, swiftly spanking Will's ass.

"Youch! Maybe, but you don't have to be so shy with me anyway. Nah, forget I said that." Will kissed his chest, his chin and cheeks, then drew himself up to press light kisses to plumply swollen lips. "I love your shy. It's just for me. It's *safe* with me, Hannibal...and so are you."

Hannibal did not answer this last remark, but he *did* blush and bite his lip while his heard thudded rapidly under Will's hand.

Satisfied, more than, Will stood on wobbly legs and reached a hand down. "Let's go home." He helped Hannibal up and got dressed again to the extent it was even possible. "You're buying me a new sweater, and not an upgraded designer one, but that same department store oatmeal-yuck color dad sweater."

Hannibal rolled his pretty eyes and buttoned his own trousers with a saucy smirk. "You do make the most appalling so-called fashion look shockingly appealing, my dear."

"Humph, I never called it *fashion.*" Will slung an arm around Hannibal's waist, the older man tucked his knife back into his pocket and put his own arm about Will's shoulder, and they walked happily back to the place where the Bentley was parked on the nearest road.

"That was wise of you." Hannibal kissed Will's forehead, took out the keys and beep-beep unlocked the Bentley.

“Look at that,” Will marveled, nodding at a row of orange-lit street lights placed on the opposite side of the country road across the street from the woods. “The way those street lamps look against all the snow, in this quiet. Reminds me of Narnia.”

“That wretched Christian treatise with the talking tiger masquerading as Jesus of Nazareth?” Hannibal inquired tartly.

“That *‘wretched Christian treatise’*?” Will chortled, getting into the car when Hannibal opened the door for him. “A *tiger*?”

“Was I mistaken?” Hannibal asked, starting up the car, still dripping a bit of melted snow-water from his loose sweater sleeves, dirt smudging his brow in a way that was much too attractive.

“I know what we’re doing later on,” Will announced, with that highly amused ‘I mean business’ tone that let Hannibal know he wasn’t getting out of whatever the proposed activity might be.

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“We’re sorry,” Will said with highly convincing penitence when they got back home to find two very annoyed FBI agents sitting on their front steps.

Will liked the sting of the first aid ointment still smarting on his injured hand, which he kept tucked in one pocket. The double bandaids kept the bite mark well-covered, but there was still dark blood blotting through the sticky fabric.

“You’ve been missing for two hours,” groused Agent Liu. “Another thirty seconds and we were calling Jack Crawford.”

“Oh?” Hannibal squared his shoulders with a surprising amount of dignity considering he looked like he’d been dragged by wild dogs across Antarctica, then won a mud wrestling contest.

He stood next to Will on the front walk, hands neatly folded in front of him like he was wearing his best three-piece suit. “Was two hours and thirty seconds the cut-off point? Anyone might rather assume you would have procrastinated for quite a while longer before admitting to Agent Crawford that you let the Chesapeake Ripper likely make off with your two charges.”

Agent Ross blinked slowly at Hannibal. “Would you like us to call him now and tell him you snuck off without telling us and put yourselves in danger? Agent Graham, I think he’d be disappointed in you. And you know how much fun Jack is when he’s disappointed--”

“That won’t be necessary,” Will rushed to say, discreetly shooting Hannibal a look of death. He passed a plumply packed drive-through bakery bag to Liu. “I’m really sorry, it’s just that we needed some time to ourselves, to...enjoy nature.”

Liu and Ross looked with bafflement at Will and Hannibal’s deranged-looking appearances.

“Gentleman, is there a higher calling than to commune with nature?” Hannibal put in more helpfully.

“We brought you donuts,” Will explained as the agents peeked into the paper bag.

“It’s midnight,” Liu complained, but Ross shrugged, “That’s only going to make them taste better.”

“No more *communing with nature* until the Ripper is caught,” Ross warned as he and his partner bit into their apple cinnamon donuts.

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“Everything’s ready,” Will said to Hannibal after they laughed and kissed their way through a much-needed shower.

As they loaded up the washing machine with the salvageable laundry from the night, Will added pointedly, “I think it’s time I ask Beverly to clean up the volume on that voicemail Miriam left for Jack. What about tomorrow?”

Examining the background noise on the recording would lead Jack to the cabin where Miriam was still kept prisoner, mostly sleeping in a drug-induced near-coma, between Hannibal’s sessions of brainwashing her to accuse Chilton, and his measures to ensure she remained nourished, clean and in good health. Will had insisted that he move the poor woman from the deep well in the floor to a bedroom, and Hannibal conceded he should have treated Miriam more humanely, a rare admission of fault on his part.

“I agree the situation is more inconvenient by the day. I should like to regain our freedom of movement as soon as possible, and Ms. Lass has suffered enough for her cleverness.” Hannibal nodded. “As you would say, mylimasis, it’s a plan.”

"I can't wait to see the look on Chilton's face," Will said with a dark smile. "You know, he's more than once suggested that I'll walk into BSHCI someday as an inmate."

"An ill-thought discourtesy." Hannibal's own prim look boded nothing but pure doom for Dr. Chilton.

He tossed Will’s flannel-lined khakis into the washer with a disdainful grimace. “These hideous pants of yours. Entirely too difficult to extricate you from, in addition to their original sartorial sin of existing.”

“You *extricated* just fine.” Will smirked and poured the correct amount of Hannibal’s overpriced detergent into the washer. The powdered soap admittedly *did* smell amazing, fresh and daisy-light like Sunday morning sunshine.

His flannel and jeans had never come out softer nor more fragrant, and it always amused him to see the combination of his casual clothes mixed up with what little of Hannibal’s laundry could be done at home rather than dry cleaned into pristine stiffness again.

He shut the machine with flourish, then grabbed the hem of Hannibal's light blue poplin pajama top, playing at making his lover follow him, when really, his ulterior motive was he couldn't keep his hands off Hannibal's tummy.

"Let's go, we're falling asleep to the *Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*."

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Will got Hannibal to make him his gourmet hot cocoa with real milk and dense homemade whipped cream, even wheedled a maraschino cherry on top, although he had to lie that he'd make himself stay awake to brush his teeth before bed.

He did stay awake longer than expected, partially because Hannibal also made three different flavors of popcorn. His post-hunt appetite was satiated by fluffy, salty, buttery perfection melting on his tongue, flecked with rosemary and parmesan, truffle oil, and brown-butter-lemon respectively. The other reason was that in addition to holding Will's legs in his lap and massaging his calves, ankles and feet with his professional masseuse-level skill, Hannibal kept asking questions about the film.

"Especially considering that she is by far the best-dressed character, don't you think everyone is judging this White Witch rather harshly?" Hannibal frowned as Will hummed groggily.

"No."

He looked up from his position slumped across the couch, luminous sapphire eyes blinking lazily. His comfy white pj pants, patterned with ships-in-bottles, anchors and life preservers, were a recent present from Hannibal, and he really loved pairing it with his tightest little t-shirt to get the most lascivious looks from Hannibal, even when his adorable cannibal was tired.

"The White Witch made it always winter and never Christmas," Will reasoned with a yawn as Hannibal ran an open hand over his ass and squeezed lightly. "The biblical devil is more sympathetic than her."

"Once I wouldn't have thought stealing Christmas was such a despicable crime."

Hannibal clasped Will's ankle, checking again that Will was solid and real while silently expressing one of the many fetishes he had for delicate little places on Will's body, the sensitive spots.

"I used to exhibit a Scrooge-like abhorrence for the entire holiday season," Hannibal admitted. "The festivities seemed a cruel way to remind me I was fated to remain eternally single and untethered to any family unit. It isn't as though I had the religious inclination to bring other meaning to the time."

"You won't hate Christmas anymore now. You're with me, and you're part of my family. We'll wake up early Christmas morning…you can fuck me first thing, I'll be wearing a reindeer sweater. Then I'll make you dress like naughty Santa while I rail you senseless...we'll feed each other eggnog pancakes in bed, then go down to the study and

exchange gifts under the humongous real tree you're going to buy us and help me drag in here." Will yawned again, lay down with his chin nestled into his folded arm, let Hannibal keep reaching under his pant leg to stroke his calf.

"Is that so? I suppose that after exchanging gifts, we might have a peppermint bubble bath. And later...invite your parents for Christmas lunch?"

"We should go to their house. My mom does an epic Christmas display, and she'll bring out all the embarrassing old photos of me…"

"Your parents' house it is," Hannibal affirmed, suddenly very invested in the idea.

Will knew he just wanted to see every photo of him that existed, and it warmed his soul. He'd love to see photos from Hannibal's childhood, too, but he knew better than to ask if any even survived. Protectiveness filled him, potent with longing. Maybe their future couldn't make up for the past, nothing could, but Will would keep trying anyway.

The whimsical soundtrack, ambient fantasy noise and soothing English accents from the movie had Will comforted enough in nostalgic wistfulness, but adding in his lover's touch...he smiled and closed his eyes, drifting deeper, carried off by many different hopes and into dreams.

"Will," Hannibal whispered, "You forgot to brush your teeth. Will?"

Chapter End Notes

Agents Liu and Ross like this timeline a lot better than "Dark Horse" by the way~ 🤣

Hannibal's French sweet nothings in this chapter:

"I am addicted to you"
"I have you under my skin"
"You set my heart racing"
"You are the love of my life"

And Will's:
"You are a smooth talker! I have a crush on you. Give me a hug!"

I used a phrase reference rather than Google translate, in an effort to avoid errors. If you notice any French mistakes, though, just let me know 😄

Murder Husbands pjs in this chapter:
Hannibal:
https://www.jcrew.com/p/mens_category/pajamas_and_loungewear/pajama_sets/pajama-set-in-cotton-poplin/H8038?color_name=eoe-bold-peri&colorProductCode=H8038

Will: https://www.landsend.com/products/mens-flannel-pajama-pants/id_274197?attributes=43401,44967,46396

Coming up next:
Hannibal makes a big decision.

Choux pastry heart

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Part Three: Slow motion double vision in a rose blush

Will woke the next morning with his face crushed into the couch pillow, which he must have clung onto thinking it was Hannibal. He only roused because of the gentle hand on his shoulder and the soft, deep Lithuanian voice murmuring, “My darling, you must wake now."

The profiler’s body was curled, fetus-style, feet hanging off the edge of the sofa, mouth open with a small string of drool wetting the fussy, eccentric pillow, a zebra print one with tassels on it that were stuck to his stubbled cheek.

His hair was matted to his face like glue, and he let out a reluctant noise at establishing half-consciousness, a language-less grunt of disapproval sort of like “no-ish-tooearlygoway.”

He batted at Hannibal’s hand, then wriggled his butt around trying to figure out where he actually was and how to lie down and find a blanket.

“Oh, dear,” Hannibal chuckled, catching him before he fell to the floor in a pile of grumpiness, flailing limbs and messy curls. He cradled Will’s warm, snuggly body in his arms, then sat his lover right in his lap, where Will nestled in catlike and grabbed around Hannibal’s waist with every intention of going back to sleep.

“Goodnight,” Will sighed, smiling and nuzzling into Hannibal’s belly, having descended back into chaos, lying flat with his legs hanging backwards off the couch, Hannibal’s long fingers stroking through his hair.

“Content as I would be to stay like this all day, you did mention wanting to see to Miss Lass’ release and Frederick’s comeuppance,” Hannibal reminded him, prompting Will to sit bolt upright.

“Huh? Oh. Right.”

Will blinked and rolled his tongue around his mouth. He realized with embarrassment he must look beyond ridiculous, waking up like a bat out of hell talking nonsense with drool on his face, one pajama pant leg rolled up to his calf, and hair like he’d stuck his finger in a socket.

But Hannibal, perfect Hannibal, was soft in morning cuteness, black silk bathrobe knotted over his light blue pj’s with just that little peek of silver chest hair showing, coffee-colored eyes glowing with admiration at Will’s almost assuredly disgusting appearance -- he clearly thought he’d never seen anyone so stunning. It made no sense, but comforted Will, and he glanced from the doctor’s expectant, fond smile and raised light brows under loose bangs to

the silver platter laid out on the nearby table with all his favorite breakfast foods that *weren't* the dreaded Fruity O's.

"I thought you might be hungry," Hannibal explained, blushing.

As if he didn't do this every day, wake up at 5 because Will had to leave by 7, and spend his first bit of morning energy making his lover a breakfast that pretty much ruined Will for his previous delight in greasy diner eggs.

As if Will didn't know his Daddy would always look after him and make sure he left the house with a belly full of food which the older man deemed appropriately nourishing and tasty. Will knew that taking care of him was the joy of Hannibal's life, and he luxuriated in the sense that this feeling went both ways. Two selfish people dedicated to lavishing the other in generous devotion...what could be sweeter?

He licked his lips again, still processing every nuance of the slow, pleasing morning, and confirmed he tasted like peppermint-lavender-vanilla from the imported French toothpaste Hannibal always bought at a hundred dollars per tube.

"Did you brush my *teeth* while I was sleeping?"

"You aren't going to develop any cavities under my watch, Will."

Hannibal rearranged each small plate on the tray, completely unnecessary small shifts of the porcelain dishes with their fluffy clouds of sunshine-yellow eggs, plus sweet-and-spicy bacon sprinkled with cayenne and brown sugar. He'd made a winter fruit salad of pineapple, kiwi, mandarin oranges and pomegranate arils, drizzled in honey and lemon, topped with mint leaves, every color meticulously arranged for aesthetic effect, a swirl of vivid, freshly plump flesh glistening, irresistible.

But as good as it all looked, Will needed a taste of something else first. He was wide awake now, eyes raking down Hannibal's well-defined body in his deceptively innocent pj's, barefoot with his strong ankles on display above fine-boned dancer's feet. Dammit, who had noble *ankles*? It just wasn't fair.

"Will?" Hannibal asked, genuinely surprised when Will fell to his knees before his lover and flipped the robe off to the side, then spread the older man's thighs and went to work. "*Will?* Ohhh...but you were so tired…"

Will mouthed sloppily at the curves of Hannibal's thighs through his pants, then hooked his fingers in the waistband, savoring the feel of warm belly as he tugged the fabric down and Hannibal automatically lifted up to accommodate the impromptu stripping.

The Ripper's breath caught hectically in his throat as his gloriously dependable morning hard-on sprang free, Will's hand flying to it with such love, Will's eyes big, blue and longing.

"You're too goddamn gorgeous in the morning, Daddy," Will smiled, amazed as the mere sight of Hannibal's raging arousal, the feel of the hot, hard skin groped in his eager hand, made his own dick throb, and he was one hundred percent alert now.

He loved this so much, the heavy, slick push of Hannibal's dick stretching his mouth and throat, the ache and heat, raunchy taste of bitter-salty desire, all for him, and best of all Daddy's panting, grunting, gasping responses.

"You wake me up better than the strongest coffee," he sighed, "and then I'm so hungry for this…"

"But you might...be...be late," Hannibal warned in a whispery voice, sighing as Will gently clasped his rigid cock, licking again and again in dripping swirls of his tongue so that when he stroked, his tightening fingers could glide up and down with ease.

"Then I'll be late. Tell me what you want. Do you want this, Daddy?"

"Yes, of course, I always -- always --" Hannibal lost the power of speech and his breath as Will began to suck.

Vivid blue eyes shot him a commanding look, one he knew meant *tell me what you want, exactly*-- and he added with hard-earned cogency, "Stroke and suck at the same time, baby -- that's it, yes--"

"Yes?" Will smirked his wet lips, batted his pretty dark lashes, long and lustrous as the wicked fairy tale prince he was to Hannibal, never lovelier than when driving his beast wild with pleasure. "Faster?"

"Huhhhh--- yes, please…" Hannibal moaned hoarsely as Will moved his foreskin in a slick, snug grip and bared his cockhead to be kissed, licked, sucked, to envelop every solid, burning inch deep in his mouth. The doctor sank both big hands into Will's hair and shoved his hips forward, fucking into Will's mouth until he came all over his boy's pretty pink, outstretched tongue.

Will licked his lips, stood and shoved his own pants down, then grabbed his lust-addled lover and flung him around, enjoying the way Hannibal gasped and immediately got into position, presenting his ass for the taking.

"Mmm," Will smirked, giving him a swift spanking, not too hard, just a little taste of pleasurable domination to start the day. A preview of much more to come for his gorgeous Daddy, who deserved all his most devoted attention. "You really, *really* think you're gonna come in here all fucking adorable in that sweet little outfit with your blushing, shy face and a fancy, yummy breakfast for me and I'm not gonna fuck you till you scream?"

Hannibal moaned, face pressed into his hands which clung to the couch cushion while he knelt and waited, still trembling with orgasmic afterglow, well-used to the way Will liked to push him into overstimulation and beyond with multiple pleasurings, as often as they could steal the time together, day and night.

"I was hoping," he admitted, blushing redder. "I need you, Will."

"There's a good Daddy," Will sighed approvingly. He kept Hannibal's robe swept over to one side, exposing the round, supple curves of his ass as much as the light blue pants shoved

down roughly to his noble ankles. His lover, so untouchable, so above it all and elaborately armored to the world, but for him, raw in his primal submission.

“I’ll never get over how perfect you are, Hannibal. Just *look* at you, all ready for my cock, begging for it like you know I like best, but you can’t stop yourself anyway, huh? Never could?”

“N-no, no, I can’t stop. Please give it to me--” Hannibal stammered and shook, fingers digging harder into the cushions as Will grabbed the bottle of lube he’d stuffed between the couch pillows in a recent fit of naughtiness (they were hidden in other key locations all over the house, too, waiting to surprise Hannibal whenever Will suddenly wanted to fuck his brains out).

“Here you go, honey. Good morning,” Will cooed, gliding his engorged cock, dripping with lube and desire, slowly into Hannibal’s tight, velvety heaven. His head dropped as he immediately let out a hoarse curse, grabbed Hannibal’s hips, and sank in carefully until he was balls deep and groaning louder, leaving new bruises on his favorite spots on the insides of Hannibal’s hips.

“Feel that?” Will teased, rolling his hips to let Hannibal feel his full girth because two could play at *that* game. Nothing felt better, either than Will letting Hannibal fill him and fuck him into ragdoll senselessness, or to do the same to his man.

Everything and anyone else on their schedules, no matter how pressing and essential, could absolutely *wait.*

“Ahhh-aaaaahhhhh,” Hannibal cried in a wild whisper-wail, the brutally deep penetration making him keen, whining at the sudden immensity of sensation at the same time he arched his strong, golden back for more.

Will shivered in delight, but needed something more. He’d always be selfish with Hannibal, and for him -- *enough is never enough* --

He’d had the worst fever of his life mere months ago, but no fever could come close to this heated pitch of moans and erotic bliss, drawing his aching length from the slickly embracing walls he loved best, then grunting, “On your fucking back, I want to look at you.”

Hannibal shakily obliged, raising his legs in the air and holding them in place, his cock reawakening slowly but inevitably, half-alert now and twitching at the sight of Will looming above him, rapidly flinging off his white t-shirt and throwing it to the floor, naked with his curls wild and a bit overgrown now. Hannibal looked somehow so sweet and innocent, even sex-drunk and loosing whorish moans of begging, pleading for more cock, staring transfixed, glazed amber eyes flicking from Will’s bossy, wicked smile to his long fingers gripping and stroking fast his own erection, getting himself ready.

Will knelt in front of Hannibal and clutched his soft ass cheek in one hand, leaving fingerprints, *possessing*. He guided his rigid cock back in, swearing again when Hannibal reached down to help him, spreading his cheeks and opening a little more. Hannibal moaned so loud, letting out exclamations that probably made little to no sense even if one spoke

Lithuanian, feeling Will so deep that the younger man's dark, curly pubic hair pressed to his entrance while Will's balls warmly touched his ass.

This was *so* much better, looking down into Hannibal's desperately overwhelmed face, pulling him apart at the seams. He couldn't possibly resist Hannibal's now throbbing, hard cock, standing to stiff, thick attention, so he pulled himself out again only to envelop that delectable erection between his tight, insistent lips, fucking his slick, wet warmth down again and again, continually humming vibrations of "mmm, mmm, mmm," and the soft yellow sunglow slipped through the thin part in the curtained window behind them, basking their naked, sweat-drenched bodies in more of the timeless, incandescent gold that defined their love.

Will slid two fingers in and kept fucking Hannibal's hole, curving them to find the sweet spot while his concentration on this made his mouth temporarily slow on the older man's cock. Hannibal moaned in weak, needy demand for release and stroked himself, earning a reproving look from Will, even as the profiler slammed his hand faster and licked his lips at the sight of Hannibal spread out and glistening in morning sun, sweat and arousal.

"You're breaking the rules, but I'm gonna let it go today because you're so goddamn cute," Will grunted, devastatingly in love, high on the way Hannibal's beautiful body squeezed his cleverly questing fingers, adoring Hannibal's whines of appreciation at the indulgent forgiveness.

"I'm sorry, baby, I didn't mean to touch myself without permission," Hannibal sighed, taking Will at his word, however, as he kept jerking himself off, horny beyond control.

"I love you, Daddy, take your pleasure, show me. How you touch yourself for me and put on a show while I finger-fuck your gorgeous body, come on." Will smiled with devilish heat and blazed down on Hannibal with his bright blue, owning gaze, bore down and in with his knowing, targeted finger thrusts, finding and rubbing the exact place inside Hannibal that made the world blur.

Hannibal's hips spasmed roughly as his legs trembled even harder and thick dribbles of seed spilled from his cock all over his hand, and he muttered desperately in French, this time knowing Will understood, "Je t'aime pour toujours" -- it sounded like he was choking on his own breath in the throes of euphoria, poor thing. Will took mercy, caressing his thighs, murmuring "I know, I know, sweetheart. Love you forever, too."

But Hannibal, lost as he was to the tingling waves of pleasure still roiling over him, swallowing him whole, he still managed to blurt insistently, with another of those sweet little stubborn, needy pouts of his lush lips, "Want your cum now."

"Hmm. So naughty." Will batted him playfully about the face, making Hannibal flush red again and bat his light lashes before opening his mouth expectantly.

"Yeah, I think…" Will paused as his stroking hand on his own aching, ready-to-blow cock made his thinking stop for a few seconds. "Shit, I can barely hold it together -- I wanna come on your sexy beard again, but I'll give you some to taste, too, okay?"

Hannibal nodded excitedly and stuck his tongue out, unrecognizable as his eloquent, uptight former self or the one he still offered to everyone else. No remnant of the person suit with Will.

“Ahhhh, so close, God, Hannibal, yes,” Will drawled in thick Louisiana tones, “Oh, fuck --” He spilled chaotically, hand quickening on his dick, making more sticky white cum splatter on Hannibal’s blonde and grey beard, and over his offered, soft pink tongue, where the older man eagerly savored and swallowed.

“Thank you,” Hannibal sighed, completely undone, sticking his fingers in the droplets of cum on his face and licking them, earning another spanking right away.

“You are a bad, bad, naughty, greedy gorgeous man,” Will accused, heart-racingly fond. He tugged Hannibal’s hair and added, “I *do* have to get ready for work, but later on, you’re in for it.”

“I...hope so...my...dear,” Hannibal said on still stuttering breaths, hair flopped over in his eyes, beard splotchy with cum, curves and muscles decorated with lovely darkening bruises and suck marks.

His limbs were spread wherever they landed on the couch, but to Will, he still resembled a debauched, muscled god from one of those Renaissance paintings of which the older man was so fond, or, well...a super-artsy and impressive porno shoot. Will would wear that magazine out if it existed; every page would be faded and crinkled at the edges from overuse.

He stood up next to the couch with great effort, unable to peel his eyes from Hannibal’s naked, temporarily sex-sated body. Hopping back into his pj pants, Will sat down and picked up a plate of breakfast while Hannibal just lay there breathing heavily and stared into space.

“Good morning, Will,” he said after a few minutes had passed and he returned to somewhat logical abilities of speech.

Will had been there meanwhile, admiring him smugly and eating toast, eggs and fruit, sipping the excellent coffee not really minding that it wasn’t hot anymore. He was burning up, and only a cold shower would get him into anything like an appropriate headspace for the day ahead.

“You got it, hot stuff,” he winked to Hannibal.

Hannibal turned from pink to scarlet all over again. Will knew perfectly well that not only had no one ever talked dirty to him like Will did, but *no one* in their right mind, who wanted to keep their spine, would dare to call him “hot stuff.” Yet now, coming from Will, he liked it excessively.

“Don’t be embarrassed, Daddy,” Will smiled, reaching over to rub his belly adoringly. “But you keep right on being shy. I can’t begin to tell you what a huge turn-on it is.”

“Will,” Hannibal said, flustered, rising slightly on his elbows before giving up and collapsing again, needing more rest. Will had worn him right the fuck out, and it inflated the younger

man's eager ego and libido every time he did it.

"As far as I'm concerned, if you're able to move when I leave for work in the morning, then I ain't done my job." Will took another sip of coffee and popped a tart kiwi wedge in his mouth.

He liked to let his voice slide all the way back down South for Hannibal. It didn't really happen with anyone else but his parents, that he relaxed enough for it. His youth held as many troubling memories as it did happy ones, and to revert to his more naive optimism, pouring it like syrup over words tripping heedlessly from his tongue...he really had to let go for that. With Hannibal, he could let go, and plus...he knew exactly what it did to his lover when he brought out the "y'all," "I'm fixin' to," and "ain't."

"For goodness sake, mylimasis," Hannibal complained weakly, accepting the juicy orange slice which his lover poised at his lips.

"Eat your vitamin C. I gave you most of your nutrients already, but not all of 'em. Mon petit chouchou…"

Hannibal groaned and finished his bite of orange in time to hide half his burning face behind a big, strong hand.

Will chuckled, loving the bashful way he reacted to being called "*my darling little cream puff,*" the expert French inflections drawled in New Orleans style, the cutesy word choices with their obvious double entendre.

"You're killing me, Will," Hannibal mumbled, nudging Will's thigh with his foot.

Will winked again, kissed his hot cheek and ruffled his hair. "I hope so. Once you get your stamina back, try and keep it, and don't you dare lay a hand on yourself until I get you naked and all to myself again. Have some protein for lunch."

"I always do," Hannibal retorted saucily, with a sly smile, casting his hazy autumn gold eyes up on Will, who hesitated behind the couch, finding it hard to leave him, even more so than usual.

"Are you going to obey me, Daddy?" Will murmured, dragging his thumb over Hannibal's over-bitten and wildly sucked, swollen-red lower lip with a teasing hint of a touch.

"Yes," said Hannibal in a whisper that took Will's breath away.

"Even in my most sensationally over-the-top fantasies, I never pictured having such an absolutely perfect sub, such a wonderfully handsome, well-behaved Daddy." Will patted his cheek and swept Hannibal's bangs more gently off his forehead, leaving another lingering kiss there. "I just had to tell you that. You made my heart skip a beat."

"Then I have done *my* job properly," said Hannibal, so very proud.

"Always." Will sighed at the necessity of making it to his 8:30 lecture, then meeting with Jack regarding the sound quality on Miriam's voicemail.

He circled the couch and leaned down to pick up the random pajama pieces littered all over the floor from their hasty disrobing.

“You may leave that, my darling,” Hannibal offered. He had casually arranged his robe to a position that could basically be called “on”, still loosely belted and showing off his mouth-watering hairy chest and tummy. “I don’t mind doing a bit more laundry before leaving for the office; I have a shorter drive after all.”

He sat leaned over his breakfast now, with as polite a comportment as anyone could manage under the conditions, nibbling the scrambled eggs and bacon with transparent hunger. He had quite the workout already, after all.

“Thank you,” Will replied, gathering the laundry into a pile in his arms, “but I’m not about to leave the clothes all over the floor. My mama raised me better than that. I’ll put them in the hamper when I go in to take my shower.”

“Your mother raised a very good boy, Will.” Hannibal sucked some honey-vanilla drizzle from the fruit salad off his fingers and Will’s knees went weak.

Fuck me. *How do people in love* leave *each other and go to work every damn day?*

“Well, you do most of the cooking and cleaning around here. I know it makes you happy, and I love that about you. I wanna put in my fair share of work, too. Pretty sure that’s what good boys do.”

“Among other things.” Hannibal stroked his neck where an especially shameless hickey shone.

“Among other things is right,” Will laughed. “And I love you being such a devoted house, um,”

He stopped before saying the word that naturally came next, “house *husband.*” Whoops, that would be a bit presumptuous. Sure, Will had been dreaming about proposing, but he didn’t want to scare Hannibal with any suggestions of walking down the aisle when just yesterday his lover had felt so frightened by the intensity of their bond and his own confused insecurities.

Will kind of wanted to go “fuck it” and say “husband” anyway to get a read on how Hannibal reacted and if he should go back to that antique store where he kept hanging around on work breaks, staring in through the windows at a handsome ring of gold with black flowers and twinkling diamonds. So what if he’d been doodling “Will Lecter-Graham” on everything his pen touched since October and he had his vows all planned out in his head? That was standard “falling in love” stuff, right?

Still, his nerve on this subject ran for the hills in an annoying flash of cowardice and he ended up blabbering, “house boyfriend” because “house lover” sounded like a real estate mogul.

A change came over Hannibal then. He sat up straighter, put his fork down and looked Will full in the face, very seriously. “I simply love you,” he said frankly.

“What is it? Something just happened,” Will guessed, nervous but intrigued.

“I made up my mind about something,” Hannibal smiled, “But I must keep it a secret for now, my dear.”

“Oh, *really*?” Will flirted. “I might see if I can wheedle it out of you later, anyway.”

“You won’t,” Hannibal insisted, beginning to stack the breakfast plates to clear them to the kitchen. He’d load up the dishwasher, with plenty of time to grab his own shower when Will was on the road to Quantico.

“I have my ways.” The younger man chortled. “I will!”

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Hannibal laughed, too, making a careful pile of plates on the tray while Will headed off to the bathroom. “No, you won’t.”

He was in the kitchen, seeing to his housework, when he heard Will’s voice call again distantly, over a spray of shower water, “Yes, I will!”

Hannibal was so giddy with his sudden determination, perhaps more excited than anything had made him, even he and Will sharing their murderous secrets.

This type of morning was nothing unusual, which was what made it so special, irreplaceable, the sort of magic he longed to hold onto forever after. Hannibal always seemed to stay up slightly later at night and wake earlier than Will, which gave him a precious vantage point into his beloved's sweet sleepy face and humorously contorting slumbering positions.

Last night, for example, Will had drifted off by the time Edmund regretted his alliance with the White Witch and reconciled with his siblings. "Huh," Hannibal had huffed, "It is too little, too late so far as I am concerned. I can assure you that Turkish delight was nowhere near as delicious as the ones I make." When he glanced to the other side of the couch, there was Will, fast asleep and softly snoring, rather than correcting him with the reminder that forgiveness and redemption were a main theme of the Narnia stories for a reason.

Hannibal had watched the rest of the movie, studying every nuance carefully for future discussion, considering every bit of shared pop cultural nostalgia another window into Will's soul and the mysteries of his lover's youth, the days they never had a chance to share. Then he turned the television off, placed a blanket over Will and crept to the bathroom past the dozing dogs on their cushions by the dwindling glow of the fireplace, and performed his nightly beauty regime of facial wash and moisturizers. His products were all habitually imported from the very best European men's stores, one more ritual that comforted him with the familiarity of preferring the loveliest, most pampering choices that life had to offer. His endless financial resources, after all, were one of the only advantages of being a Lithuanian count, one step down from outright royalty. As he lathered his high cheekbones and the fine

lines beside his eyes (which always made him somewhat paranoid about growing older, looking older, and if Will would like these small, growing signs of the gap in their ages), generous with the foaming gel of alpine caribou moss, activated charcoal powder, and palm oil, Hannibal wondered for the first time why he never had mentioned his social status as millionaire nobility to his beloved partner.

He dried his face on a plush ivy green towel and examined his slightly dewy skin in the mirror, concluding as he applied his under-eye cream that he did not wish to discuss his remaining family members, nor his relationship to them, uncomfortable in so many ways, and humbling compared with Will's wonderfully loving parents. How could he tell the Grahams of his coldly manipulative, often subtly cruel Uncle Robertus, his awkwardly complex bond with Robertus' wife, Lady Murasaki? Someday, of course, he wanted to introduce them to Chiyoh, practically his sister and formerly his ally in many a Lecter family crisis. But how to invite Chiyoh without involving Robertus and Murasaki? The social slight, the ruffling of his uncle's mean-natured temper and taste for vengeance, Hannibal wanted none of it.

It soothed his tired thought tangent to go back to Will and gently brush his teeth, then return the brush to its cup beside his own in the bathroom, turn off the lights and climb back onto the couch, stretching out on the opposite side with a throw pillow under his face. They were too big to fit side by side on the dainty furniture unless they were on alternate sides, which made Hannibal decide they needed to purchase a larger couch for their movie nights. Still, while Will's head was all the way on the other end of the couch, Hannibal could snuggle their legs and feet together, warm under the faux lynx fur Australian geelong wool throw which he had selected to compliment the playful zebra print pillows.

He had nearly fallen asleep when suddenly Will stirred, not even opening his eyes in the dim room before crawling over to Hannibal and laying his body over the Chesapeake Ripper's with a few nonsensical sleep-talk murmurs. Hannibal smiled, sliding Will's weight just enough towards the back of the couch that he himself could comfortably breathe. With Will settled 75% slung over him in typical spider monkey style, Hannibal finally slept. He woke at five as usual, unpeeled Will from him with multiple kisses to soft pink cheeks flushed with sleep, and replaced his own body with a pillow which Will immediately grabbed onto, snoring even louder.

Hannibal fed the dogs, who had adjusted to their new co-master's rituals and realized they could have an earlier breakfast by rising with him. Then he took the pets on a brief walk, simply putting his winter coat over his pajamas, enjoying the relaxing, casual moments, the quiet of this time of day when much of the world was still asleep. The dogs were happy to play in the fenced yard while Hannibal cooked breakfast, and well ready for a nap by the time he was finished plating the food and they had worn themselves out. Then, it was time to wake Will, to be the one gifted with his first smile of the day as he had been blessed (yes, sometimes he really thought such oddly religious words, out of sorts with his long-held hatred of God, but he had yet to make sense of the new, divine associations of love aside from worshipping Will), blessed with his last sleepy giggles the night before.

They woke up in rooms other than the bedroom often enough, between the affectionate habit of the late-night film viewings and their even-more-frequent tendency to have sex all over the

house until they both collapsed into unintended slumber, only to rouse hours later in disoriented bliss.

How could Hannibal go back to living in any other way than this, and what more could he ask than that it could last always?

In the here and now, he pulled out the bottom rack of the dishwasher and slotted every plate without paying a bit of attention to the mundane task. His mind was rushing over a thousand new ideas and plans sprouting all over his mind palace, a new garden for him to water and grow. No more smothering the crops of his romantic dreams in the hopes of self-preservation.

“No, you won’t,” he murmured with a huge grin. Although he said it in response to Will's insistent "Yes I will!," the words were also for himself, full of certainty he could pull off his ideas with a bit of help, increasingly confident he could defeat his masochistic reliance on loneliness.

Accordingly, once his darling Will finished tending to the dogs’ needs and set off for Quantico with the lunch Hannibal had packed him, the doctor showered, put on a three piece suit with a stylish and daring enough pattern combination to provide a needed boost of confidence. He sat down in the study and picked up his cell phone, tapping the contact number which said “Maddie Graham.”

“Oh, hey, Hannibal,” Maddie said breezily when she picked up on the third ring.

“Hello. I have something of great importance to discuss with you, Mrs. Graham, if you should be amenable.” He started fidgeting with his sketchbook, pencils and scalpel on the desktop, then needlessly opened his murder rolodex and flicked the cards back and forth. But despite the serious of anxiety-fighting stims, his heart was still pounding fast, hoping for approval from Will’s parents for what he had conceived of doing.

“Sure! You just got me between a couple of early client calls, I have a few minutes. What’s up?”

“I wonder if you and Mr. Graham might set aside some time this week to meet with me in person. You see, I would like to ask you both for Will’s hand in marriage.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks to Hannigramfanforever, who asked where Hannibal slept, which inspired me to explain it in the second part of the chapter with Hanni's POV, and then I had a few more inspirations and ended up expanding with several new paragraphs. Hope you enjoy! 💕

And thanks to all for reading! I'm excited for the next few developments of the story and hope you will find them a fulfilling continuation. 🖤🍷

When I see you, I see home

Chapter Notes

cw: brief metaphorical reference to food purging.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Several Days Later: Quantico, FBI Interrogation Room #4

“It’s him!” Miriam Lass, gaunt and intense, dove for the gun in Jack’s holster.

With the quick skill of an excellent agent-in-training, she shot clear through the two-sided mirror of the FBI interrogation room’s observation area.

Her voice, so suddenly shrill after days of speaking dull and monotone, sent a thrum of electricity through the very air she split with one insanely fast bullet. The window shattered like a great sheet of ice and the bullet hit its target almost right on point. It darted into Frederick Chilton’s face and his body flew backwards in a feat of gravity defiance seldom seen outside of slapstick animation.

Jack grabbed Miriam around the arms into a protective hug, while she immediately collapsed against her mentor, sobbing, “It’s him, it’s him.”

“Shh, you’re safe now,” Jack said grimly. He knew, same as Will and Hannibal, that Miriam wasn’t going to hurt anyone else.

The large square that was all which remained from the demolished mirror now resembled a macabre picture frame, through which the observers -- Jack, Will and Hannibal -- could observe Miriam’s traumatized, hyper-vigilant handiwork: Frederick Chilton, limply useless as ever but now at least quiet, having lapsed into unconsciousness almost immediately; and Alana Bloom, kneeling on the floor beside the suspect, trying to prop him up and examine his injuries.

“I don’t want to move him and risk making it worse,” Alana called worriedly to Jack.

The senior agent was still patting Miriam’s shoulder while the young woman’s arms, both the new prosthetic one and the organic one, hung inert by her sides, but she cried into Jack’s striped shirt and tie, hardly aware where she was. Only that she had to protect them all from the Chesapeake Ripper, and she had done what she could. Her shaking hand and bewildered but still brilliant mind had only missed her planned mark of Chilton’s brain by inches, and it remained to be seen whether Frederick would survive to endure the humiliation of being incarcerated in his own former workplace. Will hoped he lived. To be tended by the very nurses he’d terrorized with snobby mistreatment and mockery, exposed to dangerous derision

by the patients whose minds he'd toyed with in a crusade to aggrandize his public reputation as a psychiatric genius.

All the same, Will was pleased with this result of the interrogation. It had seemed a routine enough question and answer session; Alana had settled in across the table from Frederick looking resigned to whatever the interview might uncover. She'd never liked the man, but considered Will's suspicions of him as the Ripper to be outlandish. It was the same room where Miriam had watched several previous potential Rippers answer the identical list of generic inquiries. These other men, late thirties, similar build and snide voice tone to Chilton, sophisticated and pompous, were mere window dressing, providing a basis of comparison for Miriam before Jack brought in the man whom *he* by now thoroughly expected to be revealed as the true culprit of the Ripper's rampages.

And then the window, dressing and all, shattered.

Alana examined Chilton, checking his pulse, while Will took out his phone, adopting a concerned, startled look. "I'm calling the medics," he announced, genuinely feeling for Miriam's ordeal, but otherwise dreadfully amused at Chilton's expense.

Dr. Bloom nodded appreciatively, but not without that same flickering suspicion towards Will, always seeming to be there and gone again before she decided what to do about it. Will's tongue clucked in his mind. Ha, Alana really needed to learn not to let her professional judgements fall into the same disorganized, thus-far doomed confusion as her attempts to have a love life. He felt very much superior to his perceived former rival for Hannibal's attentions, and repressed a smug smile as he told the medics on the phone that there was a man down in Interrogation Room #4.

Will arched his eyebrows subtly as Hannibal took a break from sensitively supporting Miriam and Jack to meet his gaze.

Well, that escalated quickly, said the tiny twitch of Will's lips as he slipped his phone back into his pocket.

Indeed, how very dramatic, answered the caramel gleam of amused satisfaction in Hannibal's eyes.

Miriam's cries quieted into heaving breaths as Jack glanced over her shoulder at the other two men without really seeing them, or the coy looks they exchanged. With total trust, Agent Crawford said, "Will, hold down the fort. I'm going to take Miriam to my office, she shouldn't have to see this."

The medics had come rushing in to save *poor* Frederick, listening to Alana's explanation of the shooting as they went to work evaluating the wound, then getting him onto a stretcher for transport to the on-site infirmary.

"Of course," Hannibal said with the most pristine, quietly dignified bravery. "We can handle any further matters which need tending to here."

“Go, Jack,” Will encouraged, clapping his boss’ shoulder in gentle, comradely encouragement. “And thank you, Miriam. Now we know who it was. You were very brave.”

She nodded, mouth quivering but unable to form words in reply. Jack helped her to walk the short distance to the door. His office was nearby, with a good comfortable couch where she could sit or nap until her own physician and psychiatrist arrived to lend their support.

Relieved that Miriam would be spared any further entanglement in this matter and could restfully find her way to recovering, Will maintained an attentive gaze upon the scene of Frederick’s surely disfiguring injury. Miss Lass might be called as witness to trial, but Jack would certainly beg off on terms of not exposing her to yet more distress. Why should she have to relive her trauma? There were enough other people in the room who had witnessed her knee-jerk reaction to hearing Chilton’s voice; Hannibal himself might be among those asked to recount the harrowing tale in court.

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“You haven’t touched your cookies,” Travis Graham lamented the following afternoon when Hannibal secretly came to his and Maddie’s little yellow farmhouse, a few long, snow-covered stretches of land away from Will’s former abode in Wolf Trap.

“Oh,” Hannibal said, shifting in his chair, roused to attentiveness by the reminder. “How remiss of me. Which one would you recommend, Mr. Graham?”

He had sipped his chamomile tea, but failed to sample one of the colorful, cheerful Christmas cookies from the homemade assortment which Maddie had placed on the coffee table in the living room.

Travis looked momentarily reflective in a manner which surprised and confused his guest. “Whichever you like. Although, for future reference, the peanut butter blossoms are Will’s favorites.”

“Thank you,” Hannibal smiled warmly. “I do like to make note of Will’s favorite things in as many categories as possible. Mrs. Graham, I’ll have to ask you for the recipe.”

“Aw, she doesn’t give her cookie recipes out to *any*--” Travis had slapped his knee with a laugh, but Maddie elbowed him reprovingly.

“Of course you can have it, Hannibal,” Maddie promised as Hannibal bit into a raspberry jelly thumbprint sugar cookie, delicate and buttery, light as air but flavorfully satisfying. Or at any rate, he was certain it would be delectable if he wasn't quite so anxious.

“You won’t even let *me* watch you make them,” Travis grumbled, continuing his assigned work on the side, threading popcorn on a long string destined for the Christmas tree.

“That’s because you try and steal them before they’re done cooling,” Maddie sighed.

“You are a cookie thief, Mr. Graham. A habit which Will apparently inherited,” Hannibal said with his most charming smile and cinnamon eye sparkle, making his (hopefully) future in-

laws laugh.

“As a fellow chef,” he added smoothly, “I must tip my proverbial cap to your excellent baking abilities, Mrs. Graham. I am truly impressed.”

Actually, Hannibal had a difficult time enjoying his cookie or tea, still feeling somewhat out of sorts based on the vital and nerve-wracking order of today’s business in visiting the Grahams. The lovely cookie tasted more like sandpaper, or perhaps that was his anxiety covering his tongue in cement, slowing his thought process and habitual witticisms to a sluggish muddle of confusion. As for the tea, the real challenge was not to choke on it rather than partake of its famously soothing effect.

He was relieved, at least, that he had decided *not* to wear one of his usual suits, opting instead for more casual attire. A three-piece designer suit would be out of place here amidst the cutely rustic holiday decorations, the soft sound of a twangy album of carols emanating from the kitchen along with the scent of nutmeg and spice. His chosen brown and orange argyle print cashmere sweater brought out the color of his eyes while adding a dash of amiable flair with its alternating criss-crosses of tangerine, and paired well with his chocolate colored cotton twill khakis. He looked like a friendly uncle, a worthy confident, down-to-earth, with a sense of humor -- or perhaps the ideal prospective son-in-law?

It had only taken him ten outfit changes to determine this was an appropriate style for the occasion, one he had never anticipated he might embark upon.

“...we should do a recipe exchange,” Mrs. Graham was saying when Hannibal managed to stop overthinking his outfit again, merely an excuse to keep from hyperventilating in case the Grahams should deny his request for their son’s hand, or indeed show any sign of thinking him unworthy.

He did not wish to have his worst paranoias confirmed, as this brought up the rather disconcerting necessity of admitting said paranoia’s existence, sure as cramming a finger down his throat would bring up the remnants of the cookie and his sparsely picked-at breakfast of toast and eggs.

The nauseating sudden metaphor came into stark, unfortunate contrast with Maddie Graham’s kind offer of sharing cooking specialities, but Hannibal covered the discomfort well with a barely flinching smile.

“Of course. And what a beautiful job you have done in preparing your home for the holidays.”

While the Graham's decorating style was sentimentally cute in the extreme, and nothing like his own interior design, Hannibal had to admit there was a contagious charm to the glittering houses of a porcelain village destined to be set up on the hope chest for display in the large picture window. The cottages, chapel, hot cocoa shop and skating rink pieces sat waiting, along with two plastic bags of ice skaters, lovers walking hand-in-hand, and carolers, in a big cardboard box on the floor.

Hannibal imagined a little boy Will gazing at the sparkling village on top of the fluffy cotton "snow," the happy scenes of festivity mingling with the magic which children sense in the air when Santa Claus is soon to visit. He inhaled of the warm cookie scent and the fresh pine needles of the nearby small tree which sat atop a table beside the hope chest. Putting himself momentarily in little Will's shoes, he thought he could imagine how that boy would have felt, excited and loved to equal measure. The truth was, Dr. Hannibal Lecter was guilty of cute sentimentality in the first degree.

“Oh, hush, it’s nowhere near done yet,” Maddie waved the decorating compliment off before adding quickly, “But do tell, what’s your favorite part so far?”

Hannibal had no difficulty in answering this question. “The stockings hung above the fire,” he smiled, nodding to the row of three standard-sized stockings which had each family member’s name neatly written across the white puffy top, *Mom, Dad,* and *Will* in red glitter glue cursive to match the plump red bottoms of the socks that were ready to be filled with thoughtful gifts.

“Ah! I almost forgot,” Maddie exclaimed merrily, standing and crossing the room to the hope chest, which was covered in a glistening snow skirt.

“Here we are,” she smiled, reaching inside, then easing the lid back down without disturbing the white cloth over the top of the lid. She had brought out another stocking, a match for the others except that much more recently, she had carefully written *Hannibal* on it in the very same scrolling red glitter, to match the rest of the family's.

“Stuck it in there to dry because I was multitasking between the baking and putting my snow-people in the right spots over there,” Maddie went on, pointing to the chubby little snowmen and women in a row on the mantel, unknowing of the powerful emotional response she had brought on with such a simple gesture as this stocking.

She went over to the stone fireplace, hung the “Hannibal” stocking on a hook right below the “Will” one, then turned back around, smoothing out her blue sweater which was emblazoned with a design of rainbow-hued Christmas tree lights.

“Oh, honey.” Maddie frowned in concern and went to sit next to Hannibal, sinking into the overstuffed shabby chic armchair beside his own, resting a hand on his elbow. “Are you okay?”

Hannibal wiped his left eye as discreetly as possible, removing most traces of moisture. “Perfectly fine, I merely had...something in my eye.”

No one had ever wanted to include Hannibal in their family Christmas celebrations, made him his very own stocking, put it next to that of the man he loved as if it was the most obvious, expected act in the world.

The tradition of stockings was still done frequently enough in Lithuanian homes, but his parents never seemed to have the time to decorate, and when his nanny Olga tried to give the children hand-crocheted stockings one year, the Lecters had dismissed the idea of hanging the “tasteless, gaudy, infantile” items upon their esteemed, looming fireplace in the grand library.

Seven- year-old Hannibal had stubbornly kept his under his pillow, knowing his mother would be sure to snatch it down if she saw it hanging even in the nursery where he, Mischa and Chiyoh played during days of comparatively carefree joy which they had no way of knowing were dwindling in number.

People didn't particularly think about Dr. Lecter at the holidays. He always gave a large, impressive holiday dinner party, but the guests were *fans* of his, hangers-on. Perhaps those guests were merely his version of Christmas decorations, shallow and fake. A pile of cards would arrive like clockwork all throughout December, former patients and colleagues showing off their perfect, happy families and pets on glossy postcards which he crumbled into his fists before slapping them into the garbage in a rare, annual display of temper. Even alone, he felt ashamed of the need to care he would always be solitary, pride mortified by his envy of all those joyful smiles. Why did people send cards like that, he asked himself, if not to torment the singles of the world? They were all lucky he did not put their names into the murder rolodex.

A few of them, he had, out of pure spite. Most of the time, however, Hannibal drowned his sorrows with rich, cannibalistic recipes and a more indulgent amount of fine liquor than usual.

"I'm touched that you would involve me in your family's celebration of the holiday," Hannibal said, more honestly than he said most things. "Thank you both."

"Oh, of *course,* Hannibal," Maddie assured him. "We'd have it no other way."

"And if you're worried about gettin' our approval for marrying our son, go on and put that right out of your head," Travis said, just as kindly firm as his wife.

Hannibal used a soft laugh to conceal a smothered sob of relief and gratitude. "I was a bit concerned that you, at least, might have an interrogation to conduct prior to granting permission, Mr. Graham."

"Naw, and listen." Travis sat back and rubbed his chin, looking sheepish. "I've been meanin' to apologize to you, for roasting you so thoroughly the first couple of times we got together with you and Will."

Hannibal blinked. "I can only assume that 'roasting' refers to testing the suitability of one's son's partner, and not an attempt to make a dinner of me."

"You assume right," Travis laughed, looking for a moment so much like Will in his grey and lavender flannel shirt that it hurt Hannibal's heart with love for his intended fiance. "And I think I took it a little too far. See, like we said, Will's an only child. We're real protective of him, not least of all cause he's always had a track record of being treated like a doormat when he dates. He won't admit it to you, but he's let people who didn't deserve him get away with treating him badly for way too long."

"I'm not at all bothered by the 'roasting.' It's perfectly fine, Mr. Graham," Hannibal said, genuinely baffled. "How can I blame you for being highly selective as to who deserves Will? No one could be more so than me."

Wasn't it odd that he never used to feel "genuinely baffled" before meeting Will and starting to be part of a family again, but these days he seemed constantly stumbling over some new area of inexperience?

"I was frankly honored that you considered me a serious enough suitor to Will as to earn your 'roasting.' It also struck me as all in good fun. I felt included in the group due to your dares and humorous questions, and I've come to feel as well, that getting out of my comfort zone might not be the worst idea."

Bedelia would be quite proud of me for that realization. Terrified and continually attempting to pacify him with cooly sincere compliments, but truly proud all the same. He was certainly -- cautiously -- proud of himself.

"We're a little concerned that you took it all so easily, actually," Maddie remarked, thoughtful. She threaded a cranberry through the popcorn garland, creating an alternating, attractive pattern of white kernels and dark red fruit. "How must your family treat you, that you automatically assume you'll have to clear hurdles with a new one to earn approval?"

"You've slipped into your therapist shoes, Mrs. Graham." Hannibal began stringing some popcorn on a spare length of floral wire in order to distract himself from the words which hit a little too close to home. Oh, very well...they hit him directly in the childhood disappointments which formed one reason for his notoriously elegant reserve.

"Yeah, I did, huh? Sorry, that's rude. I'm not trying to pry. We just…"

"You genuinely care," Hannibal put in, glancing up from his work with the decorations to give her a brief, grateful smile, not wanting to fully think about the implications of the Grahams filling in the blanks of parental care which had long since been empty in his heart. "I can't take offense to that. It is true that my uncle is not the most sensitive of souls, and we have clashed more often than we've bonded. The mere idea of Robertus inquiring after my emotional state when noticing I may be feeling upset...it is unfortunately rather hilarious."

"We're not going to add on to that type of treatment," Travis said, looking severe at the mention of Robertus' behavior. "You can come to us if you need advice, and know any ribbing we give you is out of love."

Hannibal blushed, nodded, held back tears only with great effort.

"You're just like Will. Sensitive, a romantic," Maddie added, winding the string of popcorn which Travis was working on around her own fingers and fixing a crooked piece before straightening the whole row.

"Do *not* ever tell him we said this," Travis warned with a chortle, "But yeah. Will's a marshmallow in the love department."

It was true, Hannibal knew it all too well and treasured the fact of his lover's sweetly romantic nature, even if he was struck by the irony of Will's parents clearly (and thankfully!) not intuiting their son's rough, dominant sexual proclivities any more than they guessed at his secret life as a killer.

“It does aggravate me to know Will has been ill-treated in the past, even beyond the Viola Chisholm incident,” Hannibal said, recalling the sad tale of Will’s senior prom and being stood up by his date.

“Man, you don’t forget anything,” Travis hooted, dipping an anise cookie with delicate rainbow sprinkles in his tea before nibbling it.

Maddie shook her head. “Will gets it in his mind someone is his meant-to-be, and before you know it he’s cooked up an elaborate fantasy just in time for one more fool to shatter it. I'm so glad you're different, Hannibal -- it's about time Will was with someone so real. Makes me downright mad, how careless people are in the dating world nowadays. *I* couldn’t date in this day and age, no way.”

Travis and Maddie then embarked upon a diatribe against “these damn fool dating apps,” which Hannibal half-attended to while pondering a new embellishment to his proposal plan. Their references to Will’s dating difficulties in the past did touch upon the ever-open wound of his absurd and embarrassing jealousies, petty and useless, no less bothersome. However, it also inspired him with a desperately passionate desire to make it up to Will for all the times he had been under-appreciated and used.

“The important thing is, we know you’ll cherish Will always, give him all the best of you, keep him safe and loved,” Maddie resumed once she and Travis had worn out the topic of dating apps and mispronounced or misnamed every single one they distantly knew of, from “Bramble” to “Alright Cupid.”

“With all my knowledge and experience, I have yet to partake of anything else in this life which brings me such joy as making your son happy,” Hannibal said, completely open and honest in this.

“And that is why you have our full, unhesitating blessing,” Travis replied, extending his hand for Hannibal to shake before Maddie leaned over to give him a hug.

She was, as Will always said, such a *mom,* smelling of lavender, feeling warm and sincere, showing the soft, gentle nature that often came out in her son, as much as her high intelligence and sly humor often shone through Will. Sometimes, Hannibal thought he had more in common with Maddie than Travis, when it came to “choosing a partner who reminds you of your parents,” as so many people inevitably did. Travis was such a paternal stalwart, dependably sensible and manly, qualities which formed a complimentary set of ideas that Will strove to emulate.

Hannibal had never crafted a single one of his own personality or behavioral traits with the desire to be like his parents, although he had inherited the aristocratic bearing and fine taste of the Lecters as a matter of course. It made his heart squeeze to think that everything he knew of kindness had come from Mischa, their nurse Olga, from Chiyoh and now the Grahams, especially his Will. These lessons of empathy and caring, consideration and respect had emerged from anywhere *but* the direction of his icily detached parents and domineering uncle. As for Murasaki, her kindness had been tainted by the confused aftermath of their strange summer of...well. Hannibal hadn’t known what to call it then, thirty years ago, and he had possibly even less of an idea now.

He knew what to call *this,* here and now, sitting more than welcomed in the messy beginnings of Maddie's big Christmas display, with his name on his very own stocking because *of course* he was invited for Christmas dinner….it wouldn't be the same without him.

Hannibal knew that after wandering halfway across the world in an often gloomy and always blood-soaked search for meaning, he had found it with Will. He really had come home, in so many ways.

"Soooo, Hannibal, future son-in-law of mine," Maddie grinned, "And you know we're going to have to get together for coffee with Beverly in order to properly discuss this -- but just initial thoughts now -- what are you thinking for *rings*?"

Chapter End Notes

Homemade popcorn-cranberry garland: https://www.saltycanary.com/diy-old-fashioned-cranberry-popcorn-garland/

Here's a living room much like the Grahams' in this chapter's scene: https://www.countryliving.com/home-design/house-tours/g679/holiday-home-tours-1208/?slide=8

Next time: A Hannigram sugar daddy / baby shopping spree 🥰, and a surprise encounter with someone from Will's past (whom Hannibal actually *doesn't* instantly despise) brings about a twist of fate. 🤔

Double Rainbow

Chapter Notes

This chapter starts out super-fluffy, gets quite serious for a bit, then gets fluffy again.

cw: brief, non-detailed references to child sexual abuse of a supporting character. Some canon-typical murder husbands hunting violence. Brief references to a maiming.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Neither Hannibal nor Will was much of a “mall person,” but they did have a favorite shopping center, a large series of fancy boutiques and fine eateries in downtown Baltimore, called Garden City. Even in winter, the long walk past many specialty shops on the winding sidewalks was a refreshing means of companionable exertion. Will liked the way his arm felt nestled safely under Hannibal’s, and how his lover showed him off in public, allowing him absolutely no personal space and constantly kissing his cheek or peppering him in compliments. What could be a better way to spend a Sunday afternoon? He knew they’d be up to the rest of their favorite pastimes back at home later, with new treats to spice things up, if past precedent told him anything at all. They never left Garden City without several bags full of new toys and outfits from the more sensually themed shops, and those were only a small percentage of the many gifts Daddy liked to buy his boy when they were out together.

Plus, today they were celebrating. Frederick Chilton had survived the gunshot wound with a disfigured cheek which he routinely covered in makeup, even within his cell at the BSHCI. Scant creature comforts aside, Chilton was withering miserably in the shame of suffering consequence for the Chesapeake Ripper’s crimes. Meanwhile, Alana Bloom had been named interim supervisor of the hospital, taking over Chilton's disgracefully vacated position for the time being. It would keep her busy enough that her work on the Vigilante profile for Jack would not go very quickly, more was the pity.

Will did not doubt, however, that eventually the despicable former hospital administrator would try to spin his inevitable conviction into a form of fame that had eluded him professionally. Could a tell-all interview with Freddie Lounds be in his future?

Still, he and Hannibal could breathe easy knowing they could play and kill who they liked, within reason and while not making any elaborate Ripper style tableaus within close proximity to the Chesapeake for a while. No one was going to suspect either of them of being anything other than admirable contributors to the Ripper’s capture.

Jack was forever grateful, had invited the couple to dinner with him and Bella, considered Will a surrogate son of sorts and Hannibal a trusted advisor. Alana also trusted in Hannibal emphatically, and had allowed this belief in her mentor’s integrity to extend slightly to Will, despite her old mistrust of his calm, cool, collected ability to profile horrifying killers.

Will tightened his grip on Hannibal's arm, feeling with habitual smugness the texture of his Daddy's designer wool coat, the warmth of his strong body enticing like the manly spice in his cologne and the quiet naughtiness of his gaze. They walked along in perfectly coordinated lazy pace, content to breathe in the bracing but fresh mid-December air, enjoy the snow drifting slowly around them, tiny flakes dancing in the breeze, Michael Buble Christmas songs playing on the overhead speakers.

Everything so picturesque and sentimental represented facets of dating which Will used to distrust because it was never for him -- but now he could love it down to the last detail of their gentle conversations, shimmering with flirtation and desire, intellectual stimulation and the reassuring rawness of need, the jazzy, longing voice singing in the background, "*I just want you for my own, more than you could ever know…*"

The smell of hot cocoa and fresh popcorn from nearby venders beckoned, but Will was holding out for the frozen yogurt shop with two hundred flavors and decadent toppings which waited a few stores away. He knew he could get Hannibal to buy him his favorite sundae if he pouted and batted his eyelashes just right.

"Shall we, mylimasis?" Hannibal inquired with deceptive lightness when they paused in front of an especially wicked shop called Butterfly.

Will smirked at the window display of male, female and nonbinary mannequins decked out in all manner of sexy attire, from black latex bodysuits with whips to the softest, feathery pink negligees. He had plans for this store, alright, but some of them were a secret from Hannibal until the right moment arrived. For now, he was going to let his Daddy have an absolute ball spoiling him and dressing him up like a pretty doll, he was going to charm Hannibal into domming him later until his ass ached from being spanked, groped and fucked and his voice was worn out from moaning.

Sighing playfully, pretending to be slightly reluctant, but giving Hannibal his sauciest big blue eyes, Will answered, "Well...I guess if you really *want* to, Daddy. If there's something in there you think you'd like to see me in, or use on me…"

"Yes, indeed." Hannibal frowned sternly, disapproving (also playfully) of Will's attempt to make him uncomfortably aroused in public. They both loved to let all the heated mischief between them build to its natural breaking point.

Hannibal stepped closer and caged Will against the building's brick wall near the entrance of the sexy boutique. He loomed with his powerful body inches from pressing hardness into Will's own, his eyes darkening while his smile sparked at the corners of his lips, intent, *plotting*, holding his boy in place without laying a finger on him. They only had a few seconds before passers-by noticed the more sinful PDA, so Hannibal made quick work of reaching behind Will and giving his pert ass a firm grope followed by an owning squeeze. His big, dangerous hands had an effect on Will as immediate and profound as three shots of top-shelf whiskey, and the younger man moaned accordingly, "*Daddy,*" then bit his lip.

With a seductive smile, Hannibal stepped back and laced his fingers through Will's. "Sweet boy, you do love to provoke me. It makes me even more inclined to spoil you according to my own preferences, and to excess."

“Then lead the way,” Will grinned, unable to hold back the happiness in his heart from spilling out of his expression. No one else made him smile like this.

The shop was posh yet deeply erotic in its own demure, teasing way, and Will managed to make a few purchases without Hannibal noticing how he slipped his credit card and several key items to the girl behind the counter with a wink. That was relatively easy because Daddy was extremely picky and spent plenty of long minutes holding up various negligee sets, stockings, garters, dildos, vibrators, riding crops and paddles, so careful to see if any were worthy of his boy’s transcendent beauty.

Hannibal had a bright pink shopping basket over one arm, his posture casually expert and serene, as if he might just as easily be at the supermarket or Barnes and Noble. Will adored his shameless devotion to this endeavor, but was unprepared when, after he turned from the front counter after his latest on-the-sly purchase, he saw Hannibal approaching him with the basket filled all the way to the top with various *very* naughty outfits and accessories, including a large boxed giftset of shiny black silicone plugs, dildos and prostate massagers which said ‘Ultimate Anal Kit’ and was even waterproof.

Will turned bright red in the face and immediately had to take off his black peacoat, since he had started to sweat and he was getting even harder at the thought of Hannibal’s sensuous plans for him. He folded the coat carefully over his arm to conceal his excitement and cleared his throat so awkwardly that Hannibal’s expectant, bossy smile widened while his brows lifted in amusement.

“Would you like to try any of this on before I purchase them, my dear?” Asked Hannibal, so innocently that Will wanted to kick him and shove him in a fitting room for a quickie at the same time.

“No, I...um, trust your judgement,” Will sighed, plucking at the collar of his light blue, extra slim-fit Brooks Brothers shirt, the one Hannibal had asked him to wear today because it “brought out his eyes.”

The clothes Hannibal bought for him were always so damn clingy, with soft, exceptionally well-made fabrics that aroused Will every time he put them on and saw the monogram of his initials on the inside labels, felt claimed, so very, very special and wanted.

“I’m pleased to hear it, my darling.” Hannibal patted Will’s flushed cheek, then noticed something over his boy’s shoulder. “Ah, I do see one more thing I very much feel you need.”

“Oh, come on now,” Will grumbled as his face turned rapidly from blushing rose to crimson. “I can’t wear that.”

Hannibal had strode confidently to a rack of Kawaii-style lingerie sets and seized with particularly cheerful flourish a velvety white bra with matching bloomers. So far, only mildly mortifying, but then there was a happy smiley face on the front of the bra, with bunny ears popping out of the top, and the bloomers had ruffles around the ends. Hannibal deposited the outfit into the basket as if Will wearing it was a foregone conclusion, and knowing this was true only aggravated Will’s half-turned-on, half-embarrassed mentality at the sight of the cutesy attire.

“And look,” Hannibal enthused, adding a set of white thigh high stockings with lavender satin bows at the top that matched a smaller bow on the bloomers right under where Will’s belly button would be. “These will go divinely. I also think we will need *this*.”

Will groaned as Hannibal held up a tiny white thong with a goddamned fluffy bunny tail on the ass. “Why?”

Hannibal’s face actually softened then, from teasing and playfulness to something very gentle, sentimental, stirring Will’s affections instantly. “Because you are so very beautiful, my Will, and I don’t even think you realize how much…” He caressed Will’s face thoughtfully, running his thumb over pouty lips as his longer fingers stroked the boy’s stubble. “You are *so* lovely, my darling, so sweet. Won’t you let me show you how it makes me feel?”

“Of course I will.” The younger man smiled softly and eased his face into Hannibal’s warm palm, nuzzling a little. Hannibal’s face lit up, delighted.

“But you do realize…” Will took Hannibal’s hand, turned it over and kissed his knuckles, his tone having turned more daring, “This means you’re doing the apron thing.”

“Will,” Hannibal sighed, rolling his eyes like a martyr. “You cannot be serious.”

“Oh, I’m dead serious, honey.” Will swung their joined hands as they walked up to the counter so Hannibal could spend another few hundred dollars on him. “And you’re gonna do it soon, too, if you expect me to wear that get-up for you today. Plus, *I'm* choosing the apron."

Hannibal had tried to remain grumpy, as the “apron thing” referred to Will’s much-repeated request of him cooking an elaborate dinner of several courses whilst wearing nothing except for his apron, and allowing Will to watch him the whole time until inevitable consequences ensued. But Will’s helpless grin and the sheer joy of the time they shared made Hannibal helpless in return.

“Very well,” he agreed, whipping out one of his many credit cards from his brown leather wallet while the sales associate rang up the copious purchases and stole a wink at Will, who would have his own sneaky new acquisitions delivered to the house the next day.

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They had frozen yogurt next, sitting close together at a small table in the cute shop, ankles overlapping and smiles exchanged non-stop. Will had gotten his all-time favorite, in fact, swirling soft chocolate yogurt topped with chocolate chips and dense Italian cookie pieces, layered in vivid red, yellow and green, which were more like cake and tasted perfect paired with all that decadent chocolate.

Hannibal, of course, got the kiwi sorbet covered in pieces of fresh fruit and sat there looking so fucking sexy in a pair of black jeans Will had gotten him and regretted almost immediately, because no one should look that good in black jeans and he’d never recover.

He also had on a white button-down shirt and a pale blue v-neck sweater so that their shirts sort of matched, and his silvery-blonde hair had grown out a bit more, leaving loose, glossy tendrils of it to sweep across his forehead and be tucked behind his ears. His beard had grown in more, too, contrasting the shades of silver and gold in his hair and tanned, pretty skin in a way that made Will quietly (for now) feral. Will's wandering eyes were feasting as much on Hannibal's perfectly formed, manly wrists and distractingly capable big fingers, as on his delicious frozen dessert, so that he didn't even notice the outside world's existence, much less that someone else had approached their little corner of the shop and paused by their table -- until he heard his own name.

"Will?"

He looked up and squeezed Hannibal's hand in automatic reassurance when his gaze lighted on the familiar, friendly face of a pretty thirty-something black woman with her hair in long braids and a pair of pink-framed glasses. She was so attractive and obviously charming that Will knew Hannibal's first reaction would be jumping to jealous conclusions, but this wasn't an ex…

"*Charlie?*" Will said in astonishment, finally recognizing her, not only as the talented karaoke singer they had encountered that night at Becky's Tavern, but a friend from his teen years in Louisiana. "Is that really you?" He laughed, delighted, and sprang up to give her a quick hug.

"Yeah, sure enough!" Charlie grinned, speaking in the same variation of Southern drawl that Will and his parents did. "I thought that was you at Becky's a few weeks back, but I didn't want to approach then, I dunno, I felt kinda shy about it after all these years, and you know."

"I do," Will nodded. He turned back to Hannibal and said brightly, "This is my boyfriend, Hannibal. Hannibal, Charlie is a childhood friend of mine from back home. I'm so glad you two are getting to meet. Charlie and I used to spend summers jumping from a rope swing into the creek and reading paperback dime novels we traded while trying to hide from the absolutely *searing* sun. I'll never forget those times. Hannibal is an absolutely *amazing* psychiatrist, and if that's not enough, he draws, plays two instruments, speaks five languages fluently--"

Hmm. I miiiight be making it a little too obvious how much I want these two people to like each other.

"Pleased to make your acquaintance, Charlie," Hannibal greeted before Will could brag about his cooking. He wasn't jealous at all, but genuinely happy to meet the platonic friend and get a little more insight into Will's younger years. "Won't you join us?"

They spent some time chatting about their jobs (Charlie was in med school after several years of nursing led her to wanting to go into oncology) and living in Baltimore, and Charlie's girlfriend Nadine, a lawyer and fellow karaoke fan -- soon enough they were making plans for a double date.

"And how has everything been, with...what we worked out back in senior year?" Will asked when they had all finished their froyo and a momentary lull in the pleasant conversation left a

window for what was nagging his mind in the background since he saw Charlie again.

“I…” Charlie looked worried all of a sudden. “I don’t want to burden you with it, Will, after you already did so much for me.”

“That’s perfectly fine," Will urged. "Please tell me if anyone’s still bothering you, if there’s something I can do to help. I feel like I could have done more back then.”

“Not at all.” She shook her head emphatically, fiddling with the buttons on a pale pink cardigan that matched her glasses. “I never would have gotten out of a real bad situation if it weren’t for Will,” she explained to Hannibal. “He was so brave, such a true friend. After I graduated, I got away from this truly terrible foster family that treated me...well, they’re crazy, let’s leave it at that. And I moved up here for a fresh start.”

“Did he find you?” Will asked, drawing Hannibal’s intently curious gaze to his severe expression of vengeful anger.

“It took him almost twenty years, and God...I thought he gave up, but yes, he knows where I am, where I live and work…” Charlie sighed dejectedly. “He must have hired a private detective to hunt me down. I still have nightmares about him telling me I’d never get away, so I have to take pills to even sleep, but at least I started *over,* I met someone and we’re getting married, and I don’t want him showing up to ruin it all.”

“You have every right to be frightened, angry, and bitter about this, Charlie, it’s a horrible situation,” Will insisted, laying his hand over her trembling one as her eyes grew wet with tears.

“I’m assuming you’ve told the police but they’ve failed to take action?” Hannibal asked, his voice concerned, his face taking on a shadow of the Ripper’s focus.

He didn’t like the sound of this stalker anymore than Will did, and he was ready to do something about it. It reminded Will all over again why he was in love with Hannibal, and filled his heart with gratitude.

“Exactly,” Charlie frowned, “They can’t know where he is -- he’s not in N’awlins, and then his family won’t tell me or the police a damn thing about where he went, but he’s most likely lurking around Baltimore somewhere just waitin’ to pounce. I know 'cause he keeps sending me damn letters and flowers at work, at home...I just rip them up and scatter them all over the front lawn so he knows to get, but he *won’t.*"

“Charlie, please give us all the details,” said Hannibal very seriously, his face that paternal, trustworthy, but lethal paragon of murderous intention. “Will and I shall see to it that this stalker of yours never goes anywhere near you again.”

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“What happened between you and Charlie and this stalker all those years ago, in Louisiana?” Hannibal asked as he drove the Bentley away from the shopping center a little while later.

“She had this insane foster family,” Will explained, looking out the window, remembering like it was yesterday. “Charlie had been bounced around the system her whole childhood, my parents offered to take her in, but social services kept saying they didn’t have a high enough income for a second child. Yet they saw fit to put her with these absolute heathens, right out of *Deliverance. Carrie.* Or the damn *Texas Chainsaw Massacre.* Just awful people, tight-knit, smothering family, wouldn’t let Charlie go out and do anything, and...her foster dad used to touch her.”

Will’s fury was more than evident as his fists tightened atop his knees, and Hannibal’s own anger at this revelation was equally clear. His voice went cold and flat as he replied, “I see.”

“Charlie told me, the Spring of senior year she finally got up the nerve to tell someone, and it was me. Those people had her scared out of her mind. I broke into the house one day when the creep was home alone, and I hobbled him. Warned him never to lay a finger on Charlie or any kid again, and not on anyone grown who didn’t consent, or I’d be back. I had on a mask and muffled my voice. I wanted to kill him so bad.”

“Why didn’t you?”

“Because…” Will sighed, hands rubbing over his knees as the cascade of painful memories made him nervous. “I was going through this phase, after my first kill at fifteen. I felt so guilty after that, I tried to tell myself I’d never do it again. That I’d hurt evil people but stop short of murder. Obviously, the phase didn’t take, couldn’t last. But at that time, I was able to stop and I wish I fucking hadn’t. He stopped hurting her after that, then she got away, but still...”

“You mustn’t blame yourself, Will--”

“I can’t help it, okay? I’m sorry, I just…”

Hannibal watched the road, concern for Will etched across his features in the lights of the city streets they drove down. “Will, please feel however you need to now. I am here for you and always will be. I’ll take care of you, and we will take care of this, together.”

“Thank you.” Will blinked back tears and clasped Hannibal’s shoulder.

“I believe our fastest solution for ending this problem is to conceal ourselves near Charlie’s house until this…”

“Callum,” Will put in, “Callum Moore.”

“Until this Moore fiend shows himself,” Hannibal concluded. “As time goes by, his boldness in approaching is bound to increase exponentially.”

“Yeah, that’s what makes him so dangerous,” Will said grimly. “Can we go there tonight? I’m sorry, I know we had this night of romance planned…”

Hannibal touched his face so tenderly, his expression soft beyond anything Will might have described. He managed to watch the road appropriately while the red light turned to green

and he drove towards the address Charlie had given them. It was dark enough out now to begin their work.

“We have the rest of our lives to fill with evenings of romance, Will.” Hannibal’s sincere reassurance made Will nod in more adoring gratitude, but he could also tell something else lingered on the older man’s mind to bother him.

“Will,” Hannibal said again in a few minutes. He was very tense, protective. “When you were young, did anyone ever…”

He had noticed how Will’s temper had flared in a specifically hateful way when he mentioned sexual abuse, and it had made him worry that such a thing had happened to Will.

“No,” Will said with a complicated, flinching expression, failing to elaborate aside from adding in a darkly pensive way, “No, not me.”

***

It was their first time hunting together, and they acted with fluid, nonverbal communication to nab and destroy their prey. It helped that Callum still walked with a limp, so that when Will and Hannibal grabbed him outside Charlie’s house under cover of night, the element of surprise also ensured his struggle was a weak one. He never had a chance against the feral, vividly enacted vice grips and brutal blows of his attackers.

Blood splattered from Will and Hannibal’s knuckles and decorated their faces. It looked black in the moonlight, slick as an oil spill, and Callum was covered in it. They had tied him up, stuffed him in the trunk and drove him to another abandoned place in the woods where their work could be done swiftly, undetected. The animal came out of Will and joined with the animal in his lover, the Ripper and Vigilante beating the predator to a pulp until the spread of blood in the snow resembled the remains of a wolf attack. That’s what Will had counted on when he chose this particular part of Wolf Trap, which *was* sometimes occupied with dangerous wildlife aside from himself.

When it was done, Will collapsed, sobbing and sore, pummeled by regretful memories and the sense that he should have done more to protect his friend sooner, but Hannibal knew, felt as he embraced his lover and stroked his blood-soaked shirt-slicked back, he knew there was something more to Will’s distraught state. The story of his first kill, whatever the dreadful circumstances that prompted it, it haunted Hannibal by remaining thus-far untold, but he refused to pry into the past intrusively. Will would tell Hannibal about it in his own time.

Whatever had happened to mar the younger Will’s own fairy tale life until meeting Hannibal, the older man was bound and determined to adore, heal and soothe every single scar on his memory, on his heart, and hold him forever, safe, protected. He held Will now, stroked his sweaty, blood-splattered curls and murmured throaty words of love and reassurance.

“I’m here,” Hannibal repeated, kissing hot, blood-splashed cheeks and thinking no one had ever been so beautiful as his stunning Vigilante in the hunt, in its ragged, aching, vicious power and breath-heaving aftermath where exhaustion collided with a lingering adrenaline high, baffling the brain and dazzling the senses. “I’m here for you, my darling, my only one.”

Will snuggled into his embrace and sighed, “You’re here. You’re here.” They stayed like that for some time, until Will was shivering in the cold and snow, and Hannibal gently insisted they move on.

Callum’s corpse would be discovered, mostly eaten by various animals of the forest, or it would not be, but it did not resemble the work of the Ripper, and any similarities to the Vigilante’s track record would be useless considering the way he would be half-eaten by then, all evidence of human aggression obliterated. It was what Callum deserved, and when they left the desolate woods and drove to a random motel to clean up and change before going home, Will let a growing sense of peace wash over him.

There was peace, always for Will in the beautiful knowledge of justice having been served, innocents protected, the crooked world set right even for a brief time, in his own small way. He sank against Hannibal in the shower and let his lover wash him with caring, gentle attention, then began to smile through lingering tears and kiss those sweet lips that always had the most lovely words for him. Hannibal was always just what Will needed at his most vulnerable. Now they were naked far beyond their mutually unclothed, wet state under the cheap sputter of the motel shower-head. They would be okay, always, because they had each other. The demons of the past couldn’t hurt them when they clung close and worked together, saw each other through everything scary, all the ghosts and premonitions. They hugged, slippery and emotional, and the blood washed from their skin to circle the drain. The peace was beyond what Will ever felt hunting alone; their oneness in the kill and the comfort made him feel he levitated because of Hannibal’s dark, deadly, enveloping eyes, that perfect touch, the lethal secrets they exchanged along with kisses and promises of forever love.

They changed into spare clothes from the car and went home to relieve Travis and Maddie from dog-sitting duties. Will had texted them on the road between Garden City and Charlie’s house just outside Baltimore city proper, and his parents had been eager as usual to see their “dog grandbabies.”

The Grahams seemed to sense that their son and his partner were especially tired following what they had described as a late night spent working on the case to convict Frederick Chilton. Will’s parents did not take up much of their time with the usual chipper conversation, but instead bade them a sleepy farewell of their own before taking an Uber back home, having anticipated they wouldn’t feel like driving.

“You can sleep in the guest room, of course,” Hannibal had suggested, but Maddie Graham thanked him with a thoughtful smile.

“I think you two need some time to yourselves. We’re completely fine, and anyway, I’ve got the rest of my decorating waiting for me in the morning, and I’d rather wake up with it down the hall.” Maddie smiled warmly and gave Will and Hannibal hugs after putting her coat on in the front foyer.

“Watch out, Mrs. Claus, you’ve got some competition,” Travis laughed, and Will snorted his agreement.

“Mrs. Claus ain’t got nothing on Maddie Graham set loose in the Christmas Tree Shop,” Will put in, yawning as Hannibal wrapped an arm around his waist. He leaned on Hannibal’s

shoulder with a contented smile.

“I must concur,” Hannibal said, massaging the back of Will’s neck where he felt a slight tenseness from the night’s exertion. Their hands, during the whole encounter with the Grahams, had been strategically placed and hidden in pockets or around each other, concealing the fresh scabs from their hunt.

“Why, thank you,” Maddie bowed. She looped her plaid scarf around her neck, showing off a sparkly snowman pin. “Our ride's here. And with that, we good you bidnight!”

“Night-night, sweet dreams, boys,” Travis said, looking half asleep already.

“Goodnight, Mr. and Mrs. Graham,” Hannibal called fondly, at the same time Will said, “Night, Mom ‘n Dad,” and they were such a *family.*

For the first time, Hannibal thought about having a child of their own, he and Will. He wondered if Will would want that, and how it would be, and if he himself wanted it, because he suddenly...seemed to. The idea of Will holding their baby made his heart swell with longing for that life, growing their little family. He put the thought aside, for this was not a night to bring up serious subjects of which they had never spoken.

“So tired,” Will lamented, “So, so, tired, Hannibal. I know you’ll want me to have dinner, but I’m sleepy…”

The emotional turmoil and vigorous workout of the night had left Will his drowsiest, cuddliest self, and Hannibal huffed a soft laugh, then picked his boy up in his strong arms and carried him right to bed. Will was safe, and they had made certain Charlie would be safe, too. The work was done, for now. Their rest was earned and craved in equal measure.

He kissed Will’s forehead and whispered, “I’ll make you a big breakfast in the morning. Sleep now, my love.”

Will smiled and curled up on his side, tugging his big spoon to snuggle behind him, and they kicked their shoes off absent-mindedly, bodies tangling warm under the sheets and blanket, still dressed in day clothes of buttoned shirts and pressed trousers, not caring. Hannibal smelled Will’s hair, his neck, taking in the simple ivory of the motel soap and his lover’s sweetly dangerous natural scent, ever-enticing in that softly perspiring, peppery-citrus waft, he needed it as he needed to breathe. He wanted it all over him, every night and day.

He pressed a lingering kiss to Will’s neck, then held him while Will slipped immediately into slumber and Hannibal stayed up thinking of many wonderful future joys they might share, until an added weight at the end of the bed indicated that Winston had once again snuck in to sleep there. The dog wasn’t allowed on the bed, but he loved to curl up near his masters, and Hannibal let out a quiet, tired laugh under his breath right before the soothing presence of their faithful pet and the snug, precious curl of Will’s body against his own made him surrender as well to a deep, enveloping slumber.

Chapter End Notes

I looked at this photo as a ref for the frozen yogurt: https://www.olo-7.top/ProductDetail.aspx?iid=65006298&pr=32.99

We'll be getting back to those purchases that our boys made for each other at the sexy store, in case anyone was wondering...😏 more ref photos forthcoming! 👀

Charlie was the woman who sang "Crush" by Mandy Moore at karaoke at Becky's (Chapter 12). I loved planting her there in the background to return to later!

Re: the motel shower, I wanted to explain that the boys cleaned up in the car enough to be basically presentable to a barely awake front desk clerk so they could quickly get a room for a while, as otherwise it might be questionable how they managed to elude suspicion. There was some more blood on their clothes covered by coats, and that's what they cleaned up in the shower. *However,* no matter where I tried to place this explanation, it completely screwed with the flow of the narrative, so I had to take it out! 🤦♀

Thanks as always for reading. This was a rollercoaster of a chapter to write, hope you enjoyed it. More soon! 🖤

Lace...

Chapter Notes

cw: Hannibal in lingerie, butt plug play.

This chapter and the next are definitely for bottom/sub Hanni and top/Dom Will fans. And I had said initially that this installment is purely indulgent fluffy smut, but actually...there are also a few little plot hints involved here that will come into more focus down the road...🤔

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Hi," Will smiled when Hannibal roused the next morning with a slightly baffled yawn.

The profiler stood at the end of the bed in his coat and gloves, fresh from an early walk with the dogs. His cheeks were rosy, his blue eyes sparkling at Hannibal's sleepy confusion.

The older man had grown too warm in the night and frustratedly peeled off his shirt, toed away his socks under the covers, then flung one long leg in suit pants over Will's hip. He looked delicious now, sitting up against a pillow, hair in his face, eyes cinnamon bright, fangs peeking out from a sheepish grin.

"You're up early," Hannibal noted, "The role reversal is somewhat disconcerting."

"Oh, I *know,*" Will smirked, distracted by Hannibal's sexy, hairy chest and strong biceps flexing when his lover stretched with another yawn. "You much prefer to be up when it's still dark out, making breakfast and feeling…"

"In control," Hannibal finished humbly, surprising Will, whose brows shot up at the admission.

"I didn't expect you to just say it like that," Will said, almost blown away.

"You have a way of shining a light on my personality quirks that makes me feel they are loved, rather than judged or causing annoyance." Hannibal shrugged, resting a large hand over his knee. "Why, then, should I attempt to conceal myself in any respect?"

"Why indeed," Will grinned, charmed by the honesty. "Anyway, I woke up much earlier than usual for some reason and couldn't get back to sleep. Thought I'd make you breakfast for once, but I just got a text from Jack politely demanding my presence at Quantico."

He shrugged his coat off, thinking nothing of his random, absent-minded act of doing so before removing his black leather gloves. There was a moment when he stood there, planning to change into his work clothes, wearing just the gloves, a size small black t-shirt sticking to

his toned arms and stomach, and clingy black sweatpants, and Hannibal's breath caught audibly in his throat with a rasp, his eyes glued to Will.

"Hannibal?" Will inquired as a realization dawned. "Is there something that you need?"

"Hmm? No, mylimasis, I can make my own breakfast, don't fret."

"I see." Will took the gloves off thoughtfully and laid them on top of his coat on the low couch in front of the bed.

He went into the cavernous walk-in closet, one whole side of which had been converted for the purposes of Will's new status as a fashion icon, as per Hannibal's preferences and his own glowing pride at the spoiling. Tossing on another slim-fit shirt, salmon pink this time, and a pair of equally snug, tailored heather grey trousers with a subtle plaid pattern, Will couldn't stop thinking about the way Hannibal looked at him in the leather gloves. He went into the bathroom, glancing at Hannibal, who was still sitting peacefully in bed, now petting through Winston's fur and murmuring, "But you know you can't keep making a habit of sneaking in here at night, except perhaps for sometimes…" as the dog curled up by his side.

Chuckling, Will flicked the bathroom light on and ran a quick comb through his unruly curls, rifled by the knit hat he'd worn on the walk. He and Hannibal liked tugging each other's hair, playing with it and wrapping it around their fingers, so much that they had both let their hair grow out a bit longer than usual, without having to say out loud why. He dotted some cologne on his neck and wrists, his favorite of the ones Hannibal had purchased him, smoky with tobacco vanilla and fire amber. By the time he was adjusting his shirt sleeves in the mirror, one last look into his own deeply intent sea water gaze told him what he wanted.

"Hannibal," Will said again when he came back into the bedroom.

He grabbed his brown leather oxford shoes from their usual spot in front of the closet and tied them quickly, noting that his lover had risen now and put on his maroon robe, still looking innocent as could be. Then Will stood up straight and said firmly, "I asked you if there's something you need. I'd like an honest answer now."

Hannibal hesitated, sucked his oh-so-kissable lower lip into his mouth, released it with a blushing sigh. "It's only…"

Will crossed the room so that they stood face-to-face in front of the short couch, framed in reluctant winter sunshine from the curtains Hannibal had just opened, causing Winston to settle on the rug and enjoy the spread of warmth on his fur.

Dr. Lecter had at least two inches on Will height-wise, and ten years of living, too, but Will's smoldering expression had him entirely dominated. "What were you just saying about not holding anything back from me, Daddy?"

"Why must you ask me what you clearly have already understood to be on my mind? I don't wish to deter you with my incidental fantasies when you've been urgently summoned to work."

“Look at me.” The bossy rumble in Will’s voice left no wriggle room for disobedience.

Hannibal had ducked his face slightly, but golden-brown eyes flickered back to Will’s stern expression now.

Will clarified boldly, “Jack Crawford, and anyone else, can wait until I feel it’s acceptable to leave you for the day. You need something, and I want you to have it. Now *say* it.”

“I want you to wear those leather gloves when you make love to me,” Hannibal whispered, so aroused at the thought that he shivered when Will smiled at his good behavior in the confession, brushing knuckles over the older man’s regal cheekbones.

“It’s not an incidental fantasy,” Will determined, clasping Hannibal’s throat and giving a brief, claiming squeeze before he swept both hands over his lover’s broad shoulders, feeling the velvety robe fabric over hard muscle tensed with need. “Is it?”

“No, it’s not.” Hannibal sighed, “It took me by surprise and then I felt unsure of how to voice it when you seemed so busy. I thought we might discuss it later.”

“I’m never too busy for you.” Will undid Hannibal’s robe, bit his lip at the sight of his body, which never failed to take his breath away. He confidently slid his broad open palm down Hannibal’s pants and cupped the raging erection he found there with a groan. “*God*, Daddy. Tell me why it isn’t an incidental fantasy.”

“Because I need it,” Hannibal moaned, bucking into Will’s hand, the knowing, firm grip encasing his hot, hard flesh. “Badly.”

“Thank you. You’re being very, very good for me, Daddy. I want you to hold that thought, okay?” He slipped his hand out of Hannibal’s pants and tied the robe again, leveling the doctor with his darkest, most sinful smirk.

“Yes, baby.” Hannibal rolled his shoulders back when Will released him, struggling to contain himself as it was implicit, even if unspoken, he was *not* permitted to touch himself.

“I have something for you.” Will smiled again more softly and went to retrieve the gift boxes which had arrived earlier, and that he had hidden in one of the bureau drawers which he’d taken over for his t-shirts and boxers.

“Now, have you worn lingerie before?” Will asked once Hannibal had lifted the lid on the first small, flat box and lifted the tissue.

The box was near-tiny, as its contents were flimsy, light as air. Hannibal’s cheeks burned as he picked up the negligee and examined it. The set was ivory, sheer lace overlaid with indigo flowers. There was a skimpy, delicate bra, with a matching garter belt and thong, accompanied by a purple garter to be worn high on the thigh, and gossamer-soft white stockings with scalloped lace at the top. The filmy pieces were ethereal, pretty, and in their own sensuous way elegant.

The set had reminded Will of his gorgeous, powerful lover who so appreciated graceful finery, and he saw how Hannibal's face shifted from perplexity to increasing interest as he turned the expensive lingerie over in his hands, feeling how the cool, thin fabric might hug his intimate areas.

"I've worn lingerie occasionally," Hannibal admitted with a small smile, daring to make eye contact with Will as he stroked the silky stockings, then tugged the generous give of the garter belt. The set had clearly been made for a man and purchased in his own size. "For myself, in the past. Only when I've been alone and felt a certain mood strike."

"Honestly?" Will sat down on the couch and patted the spot beside him, where Hannibal joined him. "Same here. One time I had these sheer panties that I got to impress an ex, and they didn't especially care, seemed like the whole idea turned me on so much more than the person I was trying to…"

"There are some astonishingly idiotic fools in the world, Will. It utterly defies belief to conceive of someone seeing *you* in *sheer panties* and not feeling the earth quake beneath their feet."

"Aww, honey." Will laughed and bumped his shoulder.

The leather gloves sat to one side of Will, and the lacy lingerie laid neatly over Hannibal's lap, clearly accepted, appreciated, even if it made the new owner rather self-conscious.

"You know idiotic and fool mean the same thing," Will added in amusement.

"True, and yet how reductive the insult still seems."

"We've talked about dressing up for each other, playing out different roles when *the mood strikes* us, but this will be the first time we've actually done it. And I know it's different, sharing a kink that's…inherently vulnerable."

"Presenting one's body in a veritable gift wrap." Hannibal nodded. "Yet I do think we are ready. Ready to explore and discover every manner in which our passion might find release, satisfy the urges held down so long due to previous partners who were either disinterested or unqualified to provide the reciprocation…"

"Yeah. That's it, exactly." Will kissed Hannibal's cheek. Sweetness bloomed in his heart like wildflowers. How he loved to listen to Hannibal using at least ten more words than necessary to describe absolutely anything they discussed. Even when the doctor was feeling shy, he couldn't help laying on the fancy explanations and florid vocabulary in his same old haughty style.

"I love the way you talk," Will encouraged warmly. "Please never change."

The older man put an arm around Will's shoulder and kissed his cheek, the brief pressure of plush lips tempting and steadying. "I want us to grow together, evolve every day, hand in hand, but not to change, my dear."

Hannibal's eyelashes fluttered and he licked his lips when Will's mouth coursed direct to his own for a too-brief, but wetly possessive kiss, tongues swiping hungrily before the younger man pulled himself back with a grunt of frustrated deprivation.

"God, I hope this day flies by," he admitted with a husky laugh.

More seriously, he tapped his finger to Hannibal's cheek and slipped it down his skin and beard, tilting his own head to one side to watch how Daddy leaned into his every small touch. Will's favorite thing in the world was to have his lover wrapped right around his little finger, yearning and needy, just so he could prove again and again he'd always treat him with the utmost adoration, smother him in pleasure and attention.

"I want you to wear the lingerie underneath your suit today," Will instructed, enjoying the gulp this inspired in Hannibal. "And one more thing."

He reached for the other gift box, light pink and slim like the first one, but even smaller. Inside, Hannibal discovered a glass plug with a sizeable, clear insert and a gleaming white gem on the round portion which would peek out from his hole once it was inside him as deep as it could go.

"This, too," Will said, arousal tightening his voice and making his spine tingle while heat pooled predictably, but no less potently for that, in his low belly.

Jesus, the very thought of sophisticated, smooth Hannibal wearing those things under his designer three piece suit and stretching himself pleasurably with the plug in the time leading up to their reunion after the work day, it struck him like erotic lightening.

"Yes, baby," Hannibal agreed, cupping the plug and quivering again with impatience which boded very strongly of him attentively watching the clock all day, praying for the time when Will would take him and do just as he liked while he himself gave in like a wave collapsing against the shore.

"Good Daddy." Will stood, leaned over and clasped his face, pressing a warm kiss to his brow, running fond fingers through silky soft hair. "So good for me. I can't wait for you to tell me later, how it felt all day, and to see you, touch you...mmm. You can run warm water over that plug, by the way, and it will heat up, feel even better inside."

Hannibal could do little more than nod with a stifled moan, so Will sighed gently, entranced. Yet his words were once again firm.

"Whatever you do, honey, don't touch yourself. I will know, and it will disappoint me. You need to wait for me. Let it drive you crazy. Understand?"

***

Hannibal had professed complete understanding and followed Will's commands to the letter. He took a languorous shower, where the very act of *not* touching his body erotically formed its own torturous tease, pleasuring his masochistic tendencies to the extent he finally had to turn the water from hot to cold before he risked orgasm from lingering under the steamy

stream thinking about how he was not masturbating. Will's throaty voice issuing him commands echoed in his mind, pouring seductive fantasies over him.

It was all quite overwhelming, in new ways that fascinated him. That one glimpse of his gorgeous boy in all black and wearing those slick, suave domineering gloves had quite possibly dropped his IQ several notches as the blood in his body made a rapid exodus for his thickening, twitching cock. How he longed to be prey to Will's every wicked whim while those skilled, clever working man's hands worked *him* over, fingers draped in softly threatening leather plunging deep inside him, spanking him pink and then red…

Hannibal Lecter, previously the foremost contender for most self controlled man on the planet, knew well he was in serious danger of *not being able to make it.*

The lingerie felt like heaven and sin all at once, hugging his most sensitive and already highly aroused areas with clingy lace and silk, the luscious fabric shifting over his massive hard-on every time he moved. He had to sit at his desk for his two morning sessions to conceal the latter problem, and provided very little insight into his patients' crises. But luckily he had long since developed a talent for substituting a few well-honed vague, yet apparently deep metaphysical questions for substantial solutions. After all, the patient's journey was to gain as much from their own evolving comprehension of their neurosis, as from Dr. Lecter's sage wisdom and guiding hand.

His guiding hands, by eleven, were trembling in a rather desperate clutch to his elegantly polished desktop, and he had no other appointments until two. Normally, his "go-to" manner of filling in such idle time would be in sketching, making a few vaguely threatening social calls to disliked and marked-for-death associates, or perhaps fitting in a quick, nasty, satisfying murder before resuming his theraputic duties. But today he could not think straight enough nor move with the deft competence required for these formerly delightful-enough activities. Compared to getting Will Graham inside him post haste, every other occupation inevitably paled, withered to an afterthought. How had such frivolous endeavours formed entertainment enough to fool himself he was satisfied with life? He had to be in Will's arms, kissing each other breathless, had to hunt with Will in the thick of the night, wanted it constantly, neverendingly.

His nervous heartbeats formed a loop repeating Will's name, and he could hardly wait until New Year's Eve, when he had an elaborate proposal scene planned so that they could join names, Hannibal and Will Lecter-Graham, as it was meant to be. He wanted to begin their new life together at the strike of midnight, with a kiss between fiances, champagne flavoring their eager lips, fireworks scattering the sky above them with glitter, the whole entire world celebrating *them*, as it would seem.

Even these all-important and enchanting contemplations failed to properly occupy his mind, get him off the scent of his own treacherous arousal. The naughty underthings were like a whisper of his beautiful boy's adoring, sensuous taunts and promises of treating him to the sweetest discipline, whereas if Hannibal disobeyed the rule about touching, he knew the discipline that evening would be much harsher, not necessarily ending with him finishing, but instead being forced to wait until Will was in a more merciful state of mind.

Obviously, this was to be avoided, and he must behave, yet the pleasure emanating from the warm, wide, round plug buried inside him made every breath that was not a moan into a small victory.

Hannibal glanced at the clock on the wall and compared its paltry, almost mocking announcement of "11:03" with the identical reading on his cell phone screen. He tapped his fingers on the desk.

Which meant he slightly lifted his arm.

The barely-there lace of the bra brushed his firm pectorals and lightly pulled on his chest hair, tickling his nipples with gentle friction until they pebbled.

Combined with the continual penetration and tantalizing heat of the plug, he found he could not bear all the teasingly acute sensations unless he dropped his face into his hands and moaned softly, "*Will*."

This was intolerable. He would simply break the rules and suffer the consequences, despite the mortification to his pride and the disappointment in disappointing Will.

No, he must be stronger than that.

He stood, buttoned his dapper royal blue suit jacket over the matching waistcoat, pure white dress shirt and burgundy paisley tie. His longish hair was swept back neatly with a slick of gel, so that he appeared entirely formal and academic, even the beard he had grown for Will appearing of a piece with his sophisticated, thinking man persona.

Except that he couldn't *think.* There seemed to be nowhere to run from the conundrum, until he snapped without warning even to himself and strode defiantly to his car, driving directly to the FBI Academy at Quantico where Professor Will Graham would be finishing up his Monday lecture by the time he arrived. Afterwards, *Agent* Will Graham might be expected to return to the order of business which had Jack calling him earlier that morning in such dire need of his unique profiling skills.

But Hannibal was going to need Will's time for a while before that. He would downright demand it.

***

Hannibal would have walked more briskly, except that in some mad fit of stubborn obedience, he had left the plug in, and it felt teasingly divine as ever. After an absolute ordeal of a journey, he found himself at the door of Will's classroom, bereft of a plan other than petulantly seeking the passion that had been promised.

There he was, Professor Graham in his handsome designer clothes with his complex, intriguing eyes that seemed to drink in every detail and easily caught sight of his lover hovering strangely in the door. Will looked mildly curious, but went on addressing a few students who had stayed after class to ask him questions.

The three young agents-in-training were so earnest, it made Hannibal's stomach twist in possessive envy that they were getting so much of Will's time, *his* Will.

Two of the students, a serious, tall young man wearing horn-rimmed glasses and a nervous chatter-bug girl with freckles, had genuine questions about the story of Garret Jacob Hobbs' capture which the professor had just recounted, while the third, an irritatingly gamine petite girl with a chestnut bob haircut and cupid's bow lips, attempted to perplex Will with an impossible moral quandary of a made-up scenario. But while the two well-meaning students were clearly infatuated and engaged in hapless hero worship of Professor Graham, the curly-haired intellectual with the perfect track record of closed cases, the third, who tried to throw Will off his game, was obviously most besotted of the group.

Hannibal saw through the whole tiresome, annoying attempt at igniting student-teacher tension and knew as easily that not one student probably passed through this door without falling instantly in love with stunning, charming, darkly intriguing Professor Graham. Dr. Lecter needed to feel special again, and *now.*

Will's quick darting gaze caught the subtle burning in his eyes and his boy held up one finger indicating, "just give me a minute," prompting Hannibal to beg the Gods above in whom he had no trust that Will also meant, "let me get rid of these boring, forgettable hangers-on so I can be with *you,* the only one who really matters."

The memory of what Will had said that morning, that Hannibal took precedence over everyone else in his life, came in to offer fleeting comfort to his frazzled condition.

"You can't start thinking like that when there's a gun in your hand, a killer in your sights, and a potential victim nearby," Will retorted drily to the challenging student, who looked let down not to have broken through Professor Graham's cool disdain and made an impact.

"In the situation you just described, if you waited another second, the likeliest outcome is your death, the innocent prospective victim's death, and the killer's escape. If you want to ponder a multiversal outgrowth of rhizomatic ethical quandaries, I recommend St. Mary's College."

Will folded his laptop, which he'd been using to display slides on the large projector screen behind his desk. He placed the slim computer in his briefcase, then added disinterestedly, but not unhelpfully, "Professor Bledsoe in the Philosophy department is amazing."

The plucky, inquisitive duo and their defeated cohort filed out of the room past Hannibal, leaving Dr. Lecter to decide what to do with himself, in which eventuality, as it dawned, perhaps he thought he had better lie about why he was here and then make a brisk escape.

"Hello, *lover,*" Will greeted him, his gravelly-sweet voice echoing off the walls of the lecture hall, not that he gave a damn if someone heard.

That was sexy, his disregard for much aside from what he liked to enjoy within a given moment, and Hannibal felt dizzy with it. He was in love with Will's selfishness as much as the rest of him. Every detail of the man was sultry, irresistibly intense.

“Will, I can explain,” Hannibal began uselessly, and with absolutely not one drop of veracity.

His mouth had gone desert-dry, heart thudding through his ears, fight or flight screaming to absolve himself of the midday surrender to a lust. Why could he not just wait, calm down, instead of arriving here unannounced, as if he was some adolescent boy in need of a hand job behind the bleachers at a sports game (football? Whatever American high schoolers played), and not the terrifying Chesapeake Ripper, Hannibal Lecter the much-admired psychoanalyst, genius chef and classical musician, not anything much at all except for being Will’s.

“You don’t need to explain,” said Will lightly.

He strolled right up to the spot where Hannibal stood pinned in place by the humiliating immaturity of his predicament, and passed him, along with many desks on risers in the stadium-style classroom that seated up to fifty students.

Will closed the door, twisted the lock casually and walked back down the stairs towards his desk, lifting two long fingers to beckon that Hannibal follow him.

“Come here. We need to talk, but you don’t have to explain.”

“Whyever not?” Hannibal inquired, searching his mind and heart in vain for the sassy demands he had come here to make, trying not to stare at the desk wishing he was being fucked hard over it, but the other option was to meet Will’s crystal gaze, and that seemed too intimidating.

“‘Cause I already know what’s going on with you, honey.” Will stood in front of the desk, leaned his supple ass against it, calm and sure. He held Hannibal’s hands loosely in his own warm ones, cupping big fingers that had seldom felt so clumsy. “You couldn’t wait. You’ve never worn an outfit like that for anyone, it’s a big deal to you. The plug must be making it even worse. I think I asked too much of you.”

“You’re not mad?” Hannibal asked, and Will smiled,

“No, of *course* not. You could have just given in and jerked off, so easily. But you wanted to do as I told you, so here you are. You didn’t know what to do, not being able to wait or disobey me.”

“What should I do, then?” Hannibal asked, at a loss.

“You should take off your pants and lie down on my desk on your back, then spread your legs.”

Shaking, moaning softly, Hannibal did what Will indicated, shocked by this merciful reception, immeasurably grateful for his boy’s perfect love.

“Oh, Daddy,” Will sighed, roughly groping Hannibal’s ass and admiring the way the gauzy white underwear stretched to its limits over the weighty nudge of his lover’s rigid cock, how precum dotted the front of the undergarments with musky wetness.

He ran one finger over the strand of thin, glossy fabric between Hannibal's ass cheeks and shifted it to one side, and Hannibal's legs trembled harder.

The plug glistened with lube and the sparkle of the round gem at its base, and Will gripped it, slid it in and out rhythmically, using his free hand to caress Hannibal's slender, long legs through the soft, sheer stockings.

"Will, *please,*" Hannibal begged, delirious already.

It was the middle of the work day, they were at a deadly-serious institution of learning and justice, and he was flat on his back with his legs in the air because he was that entirely carried away by need of the man between his thighs.

"Fuck...you're so goddamn beautiful, look at you in this outfit, *gorgeous,* fucking perfect for me." Will slid the plug out carefully, hissing at the slick way the toy was released from Hannibal's tight but all too ready entrance. "I can't take your whole suit off, or I'll never be able to stop playing with you right here, and we're bound to get caught."

The older man moaned again and squeezed his eyes shut, mourning the loss of penetration and craving Will even more now. His lover's honest praise and dirty talk made the world spin faster and somehow he never wanted to stop, wanted to stay free-falling through Will's beautiful chaos forever.

"This is going to be fast," Will said brusquely, undoing his pants and shoving them down, along with his grey boxer briefs. He gripped his cock and stroked himself a few times with wanton grunts before pressing the blunt head to Hannibal's winking hole. "But tonight, I'm going to take my time, okay? This is just to hold you over and to reward you because you came to me instead of giving in and breaking the rules."

"Oh!" Hannibal cried out, much too loudly, as Will pushed in with one long, easy stroke and brushed his prostate right away. His trembling fingers tried to latch onto any part of his boy, slipping from Will's waist and falling off his shirt sleeves as Will pounded into him so hard and fast that the desk shook and a pile of papers in need of grading went flying through the air, swirling and drifting to random places all over the floor, another outburst of the chaos.

"Shhhh," Will hissed, clamping a hand hard over Hannibal's mouth to quiet his restlessly desperate moans and whimpers. "You're gonna get us caught, honey, now hush. *Take* it, now."

His hips rocked firm and quick, back and forth while his stiff, powerful erection drove deep inside Hannibal's tight walls and found the center of his pleasure over and over. Hannibal breathed through his nose and let Will keep him quiet, other than wild muffled mewls caught against harshly clamped fingers.

Will grabbed his leg, lifted his ass higher and rutted nonstop, growling, "That's right, fucking take what's yours, Daddy, this is only a sneak preview. I'm going to dismantle you later-- oh, Jesus, fuck -- Hannibal, you feel so good --" He exploded into orgasm with a coarse spasm of his hips against Hannibal's ass while he bit his lover's calf through the stockings, then licked the bite mark, wetting the silky fabric in saliva.

When Will's warm seed spread inside him with a claiming burst, Hannibal felt the gathering tingles of heated euphoria building to their own breaking point, and then when the younger man fiercely rode out his orgasm with more gritted-out swears, he came on a panicked mewl into Will's hand, weeping with joy.

"Okay, it's okay, sweetheart," Will soothed, helping his lover up and putting him back together, only for the time being. He had some wet naps in his desk drawer, which he used to clean them both, applying the most gentle touch to Hannibal, who was still shaking and embarrassed, but eased somewhat of his anxious state. "I'll drop everything for you when you need me. Understand?"

He stroked Hannibal's face and pressed a sweet kiss to his lips.

"I understand, Will. Even if I'm still learning to understand the effect you have on me, with every new lover's game we try. The nervousness of discovery is worth it." He let Will put his thong back in place in his ass, gently arranging his softened cock under the lace front again, then button his trousers, straighten his slightly rumpled jacket and waistcoat, run a hand through disheveled hair to slick it back again.

"See now you're good as new," Will said with twinkling eyes, fastening his own pants back up.

"Much better," Hannibal grinned playfully. "Thanks to you, my dear."

"Oh, I know. I just mean that no one else will know you can't get through a work day without having to rush here and beg for my cock." Will grasped Hannibal's tie and tugged it lightly, lips curled devilishly. As Hannibal blushed and sighed, he leaned into his ear and added in a whisper, "But I'll know."

Chapter End Notes

I picture the lingerie looking something like this: https://www.amazon.com/SheIn-Womens-Floral-Appliques-Lingerie/dp/B07SQ9BV9C/ref=sr_1_38?dchild=1&keywords=kawaii+lingerie&qid=1624197537&sr=8-38

And the plug like these, but glass rather than stainless steel: https://kawaiibdsm.com/collections/buttplugs/products/3-princess-plugs-set

...and Leather

Chapter Notes

> Hello friends! Shorter chapter this time, bookending the sexy frolic begun in the previous one.
>
> cw: Hannibal in lingerie, Leather glove play, spanking. Rough deep throating but Hannibal, the giver, loves every bit of it. Truly copious amounts of tooth-rotting fluff, even by my standards.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal had seen beautiful sights in his day, to be sure, transcendent wonders of the world. He'd traveled Europe very nearly in its entirety, viewing architectural and artistic glories which still glimmered resplendently in his memory palace, decorating his aesthetical senses in pleasing reminiscence. He'd watched the sun setting behind domed cathedrals in Florence, traveled Venetian canals by gondola under an immense, shining full moon, dazzled his greedy preference for beauty's highest ideals from the earliest dawning of his adulthood and consequential freedom to do as he liked.

But never, in all of his travels and even his most viciously enacted murder tableaus, had Hannibal set eyes on anything remotely so gorgeous as the sight which now filled his astonished vision.

He was kneeling in his lingerie on the rug beside their bed while Will stood over him, dressed only in a pair of tight, black leather pants and matching gloves.

"Tonight, I only want two things from you, Daddy," Will instructed, the steel in his gaze and leather flogger in his hand adding intensity to every word, in spite of his soft tone. He put the handle's firmly smooth end on Hannibal's cheek and dragged it slowly down his face, then used it to tip Hannibal's chin up, reinforcing hard eye contact.

"Anything," Hannibal answered immediately.

His hands were bound behind his back by pale blue leather cuffs around his wrists, fur-lined on the inside, soft and comfortable, but with a metal chain binding them that meant business. He was wholly in Will's power.

"Then...you're to let me hear you, don't try and smother any of your cries in response to what I do to you. And of course, the other, you know."

"I'm not to come until you tell me," Hannibal put in, shivering as his submission to Will's demands made his cock strain against the lace underwear, made tears of longing glaze his eyes and cling to his lashes. "I promise to be good for you, baby, and follow the rules."

“I suppose,” Will remarked thoughtfully, tracing his long, leather-clad fingers over the flogger’s whipping strands, “That something like this is what you had in mind?”

Hannibal raked his eyes in helpless arousal over Will’s beautiful upper body, his rosy, hard nipples, strong chest and slender stomach, every toned line of his muscles glistening in perspiration, an excitement to match his own, vivid in cerulean eyes as well. Will’s hair was slicked back from his brow, and surely not even the naughtiest, most sinful BDSM club had ever played host to such a scrumptious, capable dominant.

“It was,” Hannibal admitted on bated breath, daring to crawl closer, which made one corner of Will’s sumptuous mouth turn up.

“And?” Will said, a bit breathless himself, as Hannibal nudged his head, pet-like, against one curvy thigh in soft, smooth black leather, then the hard outline of cock just above. “Oh, Daddy, you don’t know if you want a treat or a spanking, huh? You’re pushing your luck now, I told you to stay put.”

Hannibal looked up at him adoringly. “Whatever you think is best, baby.”

In the submissive role, Hannibal was very soft and pliable, whereas Will was the formidable "power bottom," delightedly bratty and teasing. With their own strategies, however, both were equally skilled in getting exactly what they wanted. Hannibal knew if he bent the rules just a bit, he might be able to charm Will into giving him a taste of what he needed sooner, and earn himself some delicious discipline, too.

“Awww. You present me with all *manner* of conflicting inspirations, Hannibal. Luckily, we have time tonight to explore them all, in detail.” He slowly unzipped his trousers, releasing his firmly engorged dick, then slid it into Hannibal’s eager mouth with a heady sigh of approval and pleasure.

“Mmm, I do love this pretty mouth, never could say--” Will groaned and fucked deep, fast into warm wetness, ignoring all ideas of restraint, pushing directly to the back of Hannibal’s throat and further. “Never could say no to it. Ahhh--”

He gripped Hannibal’s hair in both hands and made him choke on his cock repeatedly, his Daddy releasing sharp, rhythmic breaths through his nose and letting saliva flow freely down his bearded chin while wild, unstoppable gagging noises burst from him. His stocking-clad knees bore into the rug with the rough back-and-forth friction, leaving red burn marks under the silky white fabric.

Will drew his cock out of Hannibal’s mouth with a loud, wet popping noise, then dropped to his knees in front of him and kissed him savagely, gripping his neck, scratching nails down his back, then groping his ass with both hands and spanking, the leather flogger having been flung aside in the heat of passion. “I love you, I love you,” Will breathed hectically, “You’re so fucking sexy and good to me, Daddy, everytime.”

“I love you, Will,” Hannibal rasped, tears of happiness gleaming in his chocolate eyes, every ounce of pain and tenderness wrenching his soul asunder, cutting deeper into love’s wound on his heart.

His boy was in charge tonight, yes, but also prey to his own brand of chaos, always. Will, beautiful, unpredictable dark angel, prince of Hannibal's whole world, the axis on which he spun, blinded by disbelief this heavenly, hellish creature of perfection was truly his own.

"I'm going to make one small adjustment, and then I want you to lie down for me, hands over your head, facing me." Will smiled, tear-stained eyes like the sapphire glass of church windows, his sex more sacred than any prayer Hannibal could fathom. "Handsome, irresistible Daddy, so sexy in your fancy lingerie."

Will unlocked Hannibal's cuffs and then secured them again deftly, in front of him this time.

Hannibal arranged himself as requested, on top of the ruby, velvety blanket on the bed, head a few inches from the headboard, arms stretched above him and cuffed tight, nipples straining against lace friction, cock leaking again through his satin thong.

Will loomed above him, parted his thighs widely, so that he lay over Hannibal, the older man's knees bent, cradling his hips. Lunging down, Will played with the thin, delicate bra straps while he laved his tongue generously over Hannibal's peaked nipples through the lace, swirling and lapping the wet heat of his mouth until the older man cried out hoarsely and gripped Will's bicep in something of a panic.

"I'll come," he warned, "Will, if you continue that…"

"God, I'm so fucking addicted to how sensitive your nipples are, I might actually *let* you come like that, even this soon." Will sat up and rocked his naked, rigid dick against Hannibal's over the lace panties, causing them both to moan. "How many times can I make you come without fucking you or touching your cock?" He smirked. "Wanna find out?"

"Yes," Hannibal gasped, his hips rising and falling in time with Will's frotting. "Yes, yes,"

"Huhh-- okay, I have to stop this, then," Will laughed, lightly slapping Hannibal's face on both cheeks in that way that said *"I adore you, you're so precious to me, you're so pretty I can't even stand it,"* and always made his lover blush furiously. "This is so much fun, Daddy, and you look more amazing to me than you can imagine."

Will stood, pulled his leather pants back up over his aching hard-on. "Every time I end up edging myself when I'm supposed to be edging you, Jesus."

Still, he grinned happily, playing with his Daddy all night like he loved most. The profiler returned to his place between Hannibal's spread thighs and resumed licking his nipples, moaning and enjoying it as the older man gasped out curses in Lithuanian, feeling the pleasure tightening at his core, Will's exquisite treatment of the sensitive, hard nubs sending tingle after tingle down to his twitching cock.

He only wished he had his hands free to grope Will's leather-clad, pert little ass, to swipe his hand haphazardly through lovely rumpled brunette curls, but then there was this divine freedom in letting go of his control to move as he pleased, in being prey to his Vigilante. The freefall fulfilled him as much as the mere concept of it, and true romantic connection, once terrified him.

This was true romance, trust falling into Will's embrace knowing the arms would always be there to catch him, running with the shadows of the night hand in hand from those they slaughtered, this was everything Hannibal needed and finally believed he had.

Will hummed against wet lace and lapped at Hannibal's nipples again, then shoved the bra up and cupped both pectorals, tangling grey curls around his fingers, twisting both nipples, then bringing his mouth up again and biting down on one while he pinched the other.

Hannibal sputtered out a cry of astonished euphoria as he came all over his pretty panties, and Will stroked his cheek, the leather touch only increasing his pleasure.

"That's *amazing,*" Will praised, "You're so goddamn responsive, it drives me fucking *crazy.* Mmm."

He flipped Hannibal to his stomach, and the older man went up on his elbows, dazed with orgasmic afterglow as his boy peeled his thong down and squeezed both his ass cheeks, then spanked him briskly.

"I think it's time to use this," Will decided, hopping off the bed to retrieve the flogger from the floor.

Hannibal watched his lover over one shoulder, blushing and high on the sight of his stunning boy in the lamplight, Will's face flushed with arousal that poured off his aura with a musky sweet aroma, mingling in his designer cologne. His hair had come partly loose from the suave styling, letting one perfect curl tumble over his brow.

Will stood by the bed with the flogger and stroked the whipping strands down Hannibal's neck, shoulders and back, slowly, letting him feel the softness and the clearly harsh possibilities of its quicker bite when used for its designed purpose of delightful punishment. Burning blue eyes admired every inch of Hannibal's powerful physique, the bra straps dangling from his broad shoulders, the dainty flash of lace across his back, muscles tensing beneath, the way his wrists looked, cuffed against the blanket in surrender.

He flexed his gloved hand around the handle of the flogger while Hannibal trembled beneath him, already becoming aroused again, impressing Will by defying the stereotype of virility fading with age. The profiler let the flogger brush in a tantalizing tease against Hannibal's pink, firm and shapely ass cheeks, and knew it was no wonder this distractingly perfect behind was one of the first features he'd noticed on the day they met in Jack's office.

"Dr. Lecter," he drawled, "You were built for sin, no doubt about it."

"And for you, my darling," Hannibal said huskily, with an excited smile that made Will's heart squeeze in besotted fervor.

He pulled the flogger back and administered a solid spanking, making Hannibal count the fast slaps of leather to tender skin, and the doctor was so delirious with pleasured pain that by spank number twenty, he mixed the sequence up and said the next few digits entirely out of order. Will laughed at his cute Daddy's lost-in-pleasure quirks and set the toy down again, pushing Hannibal's ass up in a presenting posture, spreading soft, reddened cheeks in his

black gloved hands and eating him out, drinking in every wanton cry and moan as his blood pumped hot with desire.

Will made Hannibal come on his tongue and the deep drive of his gloved fingers curving to nudge his prostate, and then his own self control shattered. Hannibal just sounded too damn good, desperate and pleading for even more of Will's discipling care, crying in need to be fucked, hazy-eyed and drooling.

He grabbed the key to the cuffs from the bedside table, undid them and refastened Hannibal's wrists behind his back, manhandling his lover with roughly bossy treatment which only brought more joyfully tear-streaked begging.

"You'll be the death of me," Will sighed, stripping himself of his tight pants and finally pressing his aching manhood inside his lover, then grunting with relief at being back where he most belonged. "Ohhh, but I'll die the happiest man alive."

He was just barely able to hold himself back from either coming the second he was fully seated inside Hannibal, gripping his hips, or just proposing, right when he carefully, lovingly found the older man's sweet spot again and started pummeling it with long, slick, deepening thrusts.

Marry me, Will's heart sang repeatedly, and even as his orgasm built inside him, tidal strong after all the waiting and playing with Hannibal made him damn near ready to burst untouched himself, even then he thought *I have to go back and buy that ring. I want to see it on his finger and know he's going to be mine, mine,* he grabbed Hannibal's wrists and fucked harder, panting while Hannibal moaned through overstimulation into a final, thunderous round of completion.

"Mine," Will growled as he filled Hannibal with his seed for the second time in twenty-four hours, shuddering hard against his ass and thrilling at the way Hannibal couldn't even form a whine or curse this time when he finished, splashing the expensive, fine blanket with cum.

"Yes," Hannibal finally managed to answer, belatedly, several minutes later when Will came down from his earth-shaking orgasm and uncuffed him, then gently, tenderly kissed his wrists, pressing sweet, soft, small kisses down every finger. "Yours."

Will grinned, proud and content, and rolled Hannibal over before lowering his face to tug at the garter with his teeth, stretching the gauzy fabric encircling one gorgeous thigh.

"How did you like your first time wearing lingerie with a lover?" he asked, eyes bright with happiness as he began Hannibal's aftercare, returning from the bathroom with a warm, moist cloth and a jar of soothing salve. It was nice to have his hands bare and clean from the sweat and clinginess of leather, but it had been so much fun, Will knew he'd be glad to don the gloves again in the bedroom.

Hannibal hummed as Will slipped his lacy underthings off one by one, then massaged him, rubbing ointment attentively wherever he had bitten and spanked. Naturally, this was time consuming, but Dr. Lecter seemed quite pleasantly resigned to lie there and be tended to. Will

was so incredibly pleased to see how his lover had progressed since the days of aftercare making him literally run for the hills, horrified by the immense tenderness of the ritual.

“I loved it, Will.” Hannibal let his pleasure-heavy limbs flop randomly, arms languorously spread to either side of him, fingers slowly curling to caress Will when the boy’s arms brushed against him, when his warm, toned belly did the same. “How do you always know what I need?”

“I could ask you the same,” Will answered, deeper contemplations swirling in his ever-admiring gaze. He had Hannibal turn over so he could work out the tension in his back, sighing, “I know I’m nowhere near as good as you are at this, though. How did you ever gain the skills of a professional masseuse on top of the rest of your genius traits? It’s damn intimidating how many things you’re good at.”

“It’s damn intimidating how much I love you,” Hannibal said, dodging the question so charmingly that Will carelessly let it go, draping his body over Hannibal and kissing his hot, salty cheeks.

They curled up face to face and Will breathed softly, caressing his cheeks and stroking fingers down his beard. “Tell me how you love me.”

“I’d die just to kiss you once, right here,” Hannibal professed, leaning in, nuzzling against Will with playfully sincere feline style, then pressing a single kiss to his collarbone. He drew back with a haunted smile. “I thought about that the night you came to my house, the first night, when you were there on my doorstep so unexpectedly, a bottle of wine in your hand, a disingenuous but none-the-less endearing apology on your tongue…”

Will huffed a laugh, but he was still enthralled by the confession, knowing what Hannibal had been thinking in those early, heady days when he wasn’t even sure he had a chance to date him, never mind seduce or make him fall in love.

“I really *was* sorry for flirting with you in front of Jack and well. Scaring you off,” Will bit his lip, then admitted, “Okay, I just wanted to see you again. You got me.”

“I certainly do,” Hannibal grinned, kissing Will’s mouth, sighing sleepily when his boy rolled onto his side and snuggled up in his usual little spoon position, then grabbed Hannibal’s leg and pulled it over his own, tugged his arm until the doctor’s hand pressed to his bare stomach, as a child reaches for the teddy bear they can’t sleep without.

Hannibal buried his nose in Will’s hair and wished it was New Year’s Eve, wondering if he’d truly be able to wait to bring out the ring hidden in the locked secret compartment of his desk drawer, down the hall in the study. Christmas was so near now, and Will would be so beautiful in the glow of the tree lights, the simple domestic pleasures of the season lighting up his face with happiness. When things were this heart-meltingly good, it was near-impossible to wait, but he wrestled with a commitment he still felt to adhere with his original plan -- he knew it would be so meaningful to Will if he carried it off the way he had so carefully plotted…

“*Ar tekėsi už manęs?*” He whispered in Lithuanian, “*Will you marry me?*” because he couldn’t resist saying it, even if shrouded, even if he did want to be patient until midnight on January first.

“That’s pretty,” Will murmured, half-asleep, warm body nestled back into Hannibal, his hand holding Hannibal’s firmly on his stomach until his grip slowly loosed with impending slumber. “Night night, sweetheart,” he yawned, dark, long lashes fluttering down as his dreams enveloped him.

Ah. There it is. Hannibal had been testing to see if Will had learned enough Lithuanian to understand his impromptu proposal, but clearly fate was telling him to wait as planned until the new year.

“Sweet dreams, mylimasis,” Hannibal said with a soft smile. Will was the sweetest dream of all, a dream come true.

Chapter End Notes

There was a little allusion in there to Pat Benatar's song "Shadows of the Night." I had my '80's playlist on in the background while writing and this one came on...the lyrics are such a fit for Hannigram. 💞Sigh!

I'm still updating my Spotify playlist for "Gold Rush" with each chapter, so there are songs to match all of the ongoing themes. Here's the link: https://open.spotify.com/playlist/4WeoEljZNjydQouKxoEISf?si=fbd8efefbc274f73

Next time:
Hannibal and Will celebrate their first Christmas together, including sexy shenanigans, holiday traditions new and old, and a big secret comes to light! 🖤🍷

Heaven on Earth

Chapter Notes

Hi all! Welcome to Christmas in July (or at least, I'm publishing this originally on June 30, so pretty damn close to July, and enough of an excuse 😂)

...It's 95 degrees where I live 🥵

Once I got into it, I found I'd need two chapters to cover all of Christmas, so the 25th, and the big secret thing I previewed, will be in the next installment, coming soon! ❤️

cw: Very brief references to a child serial killer case. Will in lingerie; biting and spanking.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It had been an endlessly frustrating day, a day which tore Hannibal's enthusiasm from him until he could truly have wrung the neck of the nearest hapless victim, yet felt so tired in mind and soul that he would not have the energy to make the subsequent tartare to his usual standard.

Will had to leave the state for a case, and Hannibal had tried to rein in his excessive co-dependence enough to show he would be fine, could go about his daily rituals undeterred by having to be alone at night (aside, of course, from the dogs, whose presence comforted him, but also reminded him of Will. Will, who seldom had time to talk on the phone or video call -- he was busy catching a truly despicable killer for whom Hannibal could muster no respect and admitted should be stopped post-haste. This killer was rude, not least of all in taking Will away from his attentive lover, but perhaps more directly for targeting children).

The days dragged in sluggish succession and he resented the hours, empty no matter how he tried to fill them with art, music, cookery, socializing, nothing had meaning without Will. He found himself talking excessively about his boy, so that, judging by her expression, Dr. Du Maurier seemed to occasionally phase away to some other dimension during their session, only blinking back into focus to glance at the bottles of wine in the liquor cabinet behind her talkative, obsessed patient.

During his own sessions with patients, Dr. Lecter applied all of their various problems to his own, trying through vague inquiries to glean free advice from *them* for his anxieties. He missed Franklyn sometimes; it had always been particularly easy to pick the other lonely man's mind for revelations as to the root cause of this terrible emotion. Hannibal now considered nothing worse than that dull ache, the *wanting*, an appetite, all-consuming, which no one but the beloved could sate.

At least during his coffee shop meeting with Maddie Graham and Beverly Katz to discuss engagement rings, Hannibal had been free to talk about his favorite subject (Will, Will, Will) (Will) without raising any eyebrows, only earning fond and understanding smiles.

By the fourth day of Will's absence, Hannibal gave serious thought to returning to study his time travel formulae, to see if there might be a way to jump over any remaining days which might elapse before his lover was back in his arms. But as he unlocked the front door of their home one evening after work with the same gloomy expression which had characterized this dull procedure since Will departed, he instantly sensed something was different.

The subtle, familiar scent of smoky amber-vanilla cologne tantalized his senses, while the sound of peppy pop music wafted from down the hall in his study. Hannibal's heart skipped a beat and he nearly tripped over his shiny black oxfords, slamming the door shut behind him and launching himself down the hall.

He had not changed, as was his normal habit, from his work shoes to his velvet slippers, had not properly hung his coat on the rack, but instead stumbled for the study, yanking his overcoat off on the way with a downright uncouth tug and slamming it onto a side-table in the hall.

Breathless, he hung by his instantly sweaty palms on either side of the doorway, baffled by the bubblegum anthem playing from the room, the female singer's voice melting over lyrics with soft sensuality, "*I've waited all my life for you / My favorite kiss, your perfect skin, your perfect smile…"*

And there was his darling Will, suddenly here again, but more, playing a game designed to drive him wonderfully wild. In total shock, Hannibal froze at the sight of his lover, kneeling in front of him in the center of the room, near his own favorite reading armchair.

Not only was Will wearing the bunny lingerie set, complete with smiling, soft plush bra and cute bloomers, with the matching thigh high stockings, but he had added a pair of white bunny ears atop his head, protruding from his tousled chocolate curls with perky cheer. One bunny ear stood straight up while the other was crooked adorably, and the "*Slut*" paddle was perched between Will's teeth.

Hannibal's heart felt it might explode. He ran to Will and smothered him with kisses, hands wrapping around his dear face and plunging deep into soft curls, lifting his lover up to him even before his own knees had time to hit the floor, along with the paddle.

"Hi, Daddy," Will giggled, ecstatically returning every devoted kiss. "You know, I did have a whole little speech planned for this."

"You're here," Hannibal murmured huskily. He knelt in front of Will, pressing kiss after kiss on pink, soft, turned-up lips, smoothing his hands down Will's back to feel the slender muscle, then squeezing the firm curves of his ass. "You're here."

"I'm here," Will grinned, kissing the tip of Hannibal's nose, his blushing cheeks, his insatiable lips. "I closed the case. Told you I'd be back soon. Nothing could hold me back."

“Good,” Hannibal said more insistently, passionate lust painting his adoring emotions with a fresh tumult of need. He lifted Will bodily and went on kissing as his bunny wrapped arms and legs around him in an eager grip.

Hannibal dropped into the velvety green armchair behind him with Will settling on his lap. The older man huffed a laugh as the song wound on in its cute enthusiasm. “Is this…”

“Yup,” Will said, amusement twinkling in his eyes, ocean blue and stunning. “Britney Spears.”

”Fell in love with you and everything that you are...nothing I can do, I’m really crazy about you," Britney sang from Will’s phone plugged into portable speakers on Hannibal’s desk nearby.

They kissed until their mouths were bruised, teeth clashing and tongues colliding, moaning and grinding, and Hannibal gave an especially loud gasp when his groping hands felt the fluffy bunny tail of the thong under Will’s frilly bloomers.

“I’m ready for the speech,” Hannibal requested, taking Will’s face in his hands with a smug, commanding smirk, caressing his stubbled cheeks, then adjusting the crooked bunny ears atop his head.

Nobody should look so utterly sexy and irresistibly divine in an outfit like that, but just as Hannibal had anticipated, his darling Will was a sight beyond his wildest erotic dreams, adorable, mischievous, impossible to keep his wandering hands off of. The innocent, playful attire and the similar sparkle of completely disingenuous naivete in Will’s shining, baby blue eyes made Hannibal groan as his cock filled out more under Will’s own.

“I’ve been,” Will laughed as Hannibal lost patience with waiting to hear it and started kissing him again. “Do you wanna hear it or not?”

“Oh, God, Daddy,” his giggles turned to gasps when from nuzzling into his neck, Hannibal bit him, sucked his neck hard to leave a fresh claiming bruise that stung and shone berry bright immediately. At the same time, the doctor’s strong hand swept over Will’s smooth shoulder, slipping one bra strap down, designating the next delicious few inches of skin and bone to be tasted.

Will was very hard indeed, cock pressed urgently to the front of his naughty lingerie while Hannibal’s broad, soft, wet tongue ran over and over his shoulder, tracing his collarbone then biting down on the hard muscle of Will’s bicep, moaning huskily as Will gasped, bucking his hips in a grinding motion.

“Mmm, the speech is…*fuck,* you’ll make me forget my own damn name,” Will complained as their hard dicks rocked together with tantalizing, too-brief but delectable friction.

He worked open the button on Hannibal’s trousers while the older man sighed hotly against his shoulder, “It’s Will.”

“Oh, that’s right…” Will’s eyes rolled back as Hannibal leaned in and sucked his nipples through the plush but thin fabric of the bunny bra, then used Will’s next upward thrust on the grinding to grab his ass even tighter and spank him on either cheek. “*Will*, that’s...kind of familiar…”

Hannibal smirked, sliding his open palms and naughty fingers under Will’s shorts and cupping his bare ass, squeezing and tracing his finger teasingly over the boy’s tight entrance, playing with the string of the thong and the fluffy little bunny tail just above that lovely, beckoning hole.

“I’ve been...a very, very naughty bunny,” Will managed to moan the rest of his speech out, now riding Hannibal’s thigh and leaning down to seize his Daddy’s lips in a sloppy kiss. “What’s to be done about that?”

“I think you know, intolerably provoking, terrible little brat that you are,” Hannibal answered gruffly, kissing Will back hard while the younger man kept grinding and he put one hand in pretty curls to tug and pull, the other under Will’s bra to scrape over firmly aroused nipples.

“Ate fast food...didn’t get enough sleep...while we were apart,” Will explained, hectic gasps interrupting his sentence as he rocked his aching length rhythmically against the soft but muscular curve of Hannibal’s thigh.

“Is that so?” Hannibal bit the other side of his neck briskly, fangs leaving red indentations on the pale, delicate line of his boy’s precious throat.

Will, his beloved territory, must be marked up from head to toe with Daddy’s bruises, bite marks and handprints, or he simply wouldn’t be able to breathe freely. He had to know it was there for him to see, for Will to *feel,* night and day.

“Mmmm---ahhh, so good,” Will whimpered, shoving his hips forward in time with Hannibal’s aggressive, gropes of his ass, “You know, I've been a bad little bunny, that’s-- *fuck,* I’m fucking close already, that’s why I brought the paddle --- before you had me here, giving you -- *oh!* a lap dance--”

“You’re not going to come yet,” Hannibal said throatily, “Stop, now.”

The naughty bunny frowned, shivered and moaned with the edging, his cock standing out boldly under his cute shorts. Hannibal’s stern expression softened. “I want you to come with me so deep inside you, you can barely breathe, and you forget what gravity feels like,” he elaborated, dropping to his knees before Will and slipping the shorts down, kissing all over pretty legs wrapped in white silk stockings, and then Will’s thighs, so shapely he really must spend a few extra moments in nibbling at them, making runs in the expensive stockings.

Will’s hand fell into Hannibal’s hair. “This doesn’t feel much like a punishment, *God, Hannibal*--” His closed eyes flew open as Hannibal pressed a kiss to the head of his cock through gauzy white lace, savoring the taste of precum dotting the front of the thong.

“It isn’t,” Hannibal smiled, in an extremely indulgent mood. “You’ve worked hard, done well, and Daddy is very proud of you. Furthermore, I’ve missed you beyond anything I can

express in words...any words, in any language. It has been boundless."

"Oh, honey," Will sighed, raking his hands through silvery strands while Hannibal rubbed his prickly beard against his thighs, then licked up and down the younger man's rigid length. "I'll always come back to you."

"I'll always be here," Hannibal said thickly. He stood and kissed Will so softly, making a sweet, small, wet smacking sound, then turned his boy around and bent him over the couch. "Now then…"

As it developed, Hannibal had replenished the bottle of lubricant between the couch cushions when the original one ran out due to their excessive habit of riding each other or 69ing when they were supposedly "watching a movie."

Will found this out very swiftly thereafter, as he gripped the back of the couch and stuck his ass out towards Hannibal, who had neatly tucked the thong strap to one side and eased his own raging erection, coated with lube, slowly, slowly inside the clenching heat of Will's body.

"Too soon, my darling?" Hannibal asked, and it would have been polite if his voice wasn't falling apart with lustful need, pausing with the thick, leaking head of his cock barely pressed into Will. "Would you like Daddy's fingers first?"

He massaged one hand over Will's back and used the other one to grip the boy's perky, soft, stunning ass, staring at every inch of beauty before him in turn -- messy curls, floppy bunny ears, cute bra with the straps hanging from lovely shoulders to caress powerful, justice-enforcing biceps, supple curves and those limber legs he so loved to toss over his own shoulders, all wrapped up in velvet, lace and silk, a present for Daddy. How could his first instinct be anything other than to reward such gorgeously good behavior?

"N-no, this is perfect," Will hissed out, pain of the immense penetration eased by lube, Hannibal's slow pace and careful forward glide, and his own desperate longing to be filled by his handsome, insanely well-endowed Daddy. "It's what I've been dreaming about since the second I had to walk away from you."

"That's a good boy." Hannibal pulled his own hips back and rocked solidly into Will, letting his whole cock glide straight to the hilt now that he had prepared Will with enough gradual, shallow thrusts. He reached in front of him, still clad in his lavender shirt, unbuttoned and open to show off his firm, furry chest and belly, the curve of which now slammed right into Will's supple behind. He took Will's cock out of the lacy confines of his panties and stroked him exquisitely, not wanting his darling to have to wait much longer for his first of many orgasms for the night.

"You know I'll never last," Will whispered, voice gone hoarse as he backed his ass into every rougher thrust, Hannibal gripping his hip and leaving fingerprints, spanking him and repeating the movements, brushing his thumb over Will's weeping tip and licking his fingers before jerking him off even more firmly, fucking right to his prostate while panting and cursing hoarsely in Lithuanian.

“I know,” Hannibal nodded, half-lost to sensation between beauty and pleasure, torn asunder in such a wonderful, wicked way. He went on thrusting slickly into heavenly tightness and stroking Will, attentive to every twist and rub that brought new heights to his boy’s wild moans.

“You’ve been so very good, despite also being Daddy’s naughty, slutty --” Hannibal slammed into Will even harder, their skin smacking together almost as loud as Will was shouting his name amidst confused swears and cries. “Little -- bunny --”

Then his seed filled Will deep inside, the warm spread accompanying Will’s own shuddering completion, and Hannibal rode out his unbearable pleasure, eyes clamped shut, one hand spanking and gripping at Will’s pretty curves, peaches-and-cream turning pink and red at his disciplining, adoring touch, the other stroking Will to extend the boy’s own orgasm.

“I’ll spank you more later,” Hannibal promised, breathing hard and hot and clutching Will’s firmly slender body against him, burying his cock as far as he could and shivering in bliss while the younger man reached a hand behind him, stroking Hannibal’s hip and pressing him to stay right where he was, until biology necessitated an unfortunate and very temporary withdrawal.

Afterwards, they nestled together, splayed over the couch in a rather disorganized manner, aside from the way they clung into each other’s sweaty warmth and kissed and licked at each other’s lips, hands lazily wandering over favorite places on their lover’s body.

Hannibal lifted his head eventually and noted how Will’s ankles were hanging over the far end of the couch while his own arm was dangling off the cushion he lay on, fingers brushing the floor until he brought them back up to stroke Will’s shoulder blades and spine, tracing a drop of musky sweat all the way to that dip in his boy’s low back that never failed to make him feral.

It wouldn’t be long until they were, as Will would put it, “at it” once again...and again. And then again,

“We truly must go furniture shopping, mylimasis,” Hannibal pointed out. “I question my own past logic in selecting this frustrating, petite item for the study, but there again, it never had such vigorous occupation, nor such regular use.”

Will lay atop Hannibal with his face crushed against sweat-moist grey curls over hard golden skin, and now he lifted his head to look at the older man, causing his chin to dig into Hannibal’s chest as the doctor winced. “I’m sorry,” Will laughed, “Really, I didn’t mean to poke you like that--”

Hannibal chuckled warmly and managed to pull himself up into a sitting position, back against the arm of the couch, Will settling between his bent legs, back of his head against Hannibal’s chest. The older man imagined they looked quite a spectacle, himself wearing only a rumpled, once pristine designer lavender shirt, hanging crookedly from his frame, and Will’s bunny bloomers, which the younger man had put on him after the sex with a smirking reminder that they both looked good in lingerie. And there was his Will, resplendent in his lop-sided bunny ears, retrieved after having been tossed to the floor under the power of

Hannibal's rough fucking. As for the soft bra and clinging thong, Will had announced he found them "actually pretty comfy," causing Hannibal to threaten to purchase the entire collection in all conceivable colors and animal breed variations.

Their faces were both slowly fading from beet red to pink flushed, hair having been pulled and twisted to near-electrifying effect, beard burn and love bruises covering their bodies from head to toe.

He loved it. Criss-crossing his arms over Will's torso, he kissed his lover's neck while the boy wriggled delightedly at his tickly beard. "I meant to poke *you* like that," he answered wryly.

Will rolled his eyes. "Terrible, even for you. Well. We can go pick out a couch, order it to be delivered. Leave this one out for the trash guys, I mean -- I don't think we could sell it. The things that have happened on this couch…"

"Indeed. And furthermore, I've noticed that one side of it appears to be sagging. The frame is going to give out any day now."

Will stroked his stocking-ed toes down Hannibal's ankle and snorted a laugh. "I'm proud of us."

"What else should we do this evening?" Hannibal asked, glancing at the clock on the opposite wall over his desk. "Dinner at Aquitaine, perhaps…"

"*That* would be lovely," Will smirked, "Although I'll have to change first."

"More's the pity." Hannibal growled softly, running big hands up and down Will's thighs and legs.

"After dinner, we have plenty more errands that need our urgent attention," Will sighed into Daddy's touch, stroking his lover's forearm, turning his face to steal a kiss on one of his favorite, soft spots on Hannibal's chest.

"Such as?" Hannibal squeezed Will's thigh, then caressed his hip and ran his broad, open palm over the younger man's belly, eliciting more heightening sighs as their cuddling turned progressively more heated.

"We have to go to the tree lot, of course, and have a hot cocoa while we find the enormous real tree you're going to buy us and help me lug in here, plus, way more decorations than we need, especially if we get to bicker about the style."

"I would give you anything you desire, my dear, but I do enjoy our bickering." Hannibal smiled as their lips met softly, a promise of all they would get up to *before* their evening of couch shopping, dinner and holiday shenanigans.

"Mmm. Me, too. Anyway, I guess what I'm trying to say is I've come home for Christmas, Daddy, and it's going to be the absolute best Christmas either of us ever had."

Hannibal hugged him tighter, thinking, processing. *It won't have any competition.* He'd never had an actual "Merry Christmas" and had glumly convinced himself they only existed for those "normal people" whom he dually loathed and envied. The people inside the glossy cards in his mailbox and the carols played incessantly in stores from fall until December 26 mercifully ushered in his release from the "season of joy."

There were no words to tell Will what this meant to him, being together and sharing what he had long since assumed was forever out of his reach, as if that happiness belonged to an alien planet or an alternate dimension where he could be loved for who he was, deep inside, not merely admired for his pristine person suit.

So Hannibal kissed Will's adorably elven ear and trailed his index finger down his boy's lusciously pale, strong and soft neck. "First," he decided, nibbling Will's earlobe, easing his hand over the younger man's firm, smooth pectoral to brush his nipple. He glanced at the "slut" paddle still lying almost politely on the floor. "Tell me all about what a naughty little bunny you've been, in detail."

***

Christmas weekend brought a huge snowstorm, so that Will joked on Christmas Eve afternoon that he and Hannibal might need a snowmobile to tunnel their way to his parents for the big dinner the following afternoon.

Hannibal assured him he could shovel the driveway and yard, since the actual snowfall had finally ceased. Bundling himself up in his completely non-athletic winter gear, all Burberry wool and smooth leather, he cast a bemused smirk to Will's doubtful expression.

"What?" he asked, pale brows arched.

"You're not even wearing a *hat,*" Will laughed, "You're gonna turn into a Hannibal-sicle, come back in here in ten minutes looking like the abominable snowman."

Hannibal sniffed pridefully, but an adoring, amused smile played about his lips. "I felt that the 'Bumble' was actually the unsung hero of the *Rudolph* saga you insisted we screen last night."

"Fair enough." Will stood from the cozy chair in the kitchen corner where he'd been nursing a cup of hot cocoa and lazily thumbing through a dog-eared paperback of *Northanger Abbey.*

Hannibal had an enormous library stocked with jewel-toned, hardcover editions of every notable literary classic in mint condition, but he was rather charmed by Will's insistence on adding the contents of his own book collection, unpacking them one by one with particular meaning attached to each, sliding the used library copies, books he'd bought for college literary electives and kept out of liking, books his parents and friends had given him, mysteries and plays, guides to dogs and fishing. All of it thoroughly *Will,* including his sentimental tendencies to pore over Austen, Henry James, Arthur Conan Doyle or Tolkien, entirely depending upon which strain of romanticism, dreaminess, nostalgic escapism, or love for mystery dominated his mood that day.

There had been no new cases since Will caught the wretched child killer in Delaware two weeks since, and with his courses on break and Chilton's trial scheduled for January, for now they had nothing but time to wander the halls of their love, the mind palace of their duetting hearts.

Hannibal's house, once echoing with a dull ache inside the richly embossed wallpapers, exquisite color combinations, splendid meals and trappings of cultural intellectualism, had become *their* home. All those fine adornments of Hannibal's luxury were still there, but so were Will's clunky snow boots on the mat in the foyer and the faded jeans hanging on the back of the bathroom door with a soft flannel, the books read so often the spines were weak from Will's curious fingers over the years, the records spilling gently contemplative and intensely seductive music from a player formerly accustomed to classical, opera, and nothing but. Will, playing with the dogs in the yard while Hannibal watched through the kitchen window and cooked, nearly burning himself in the struggle of not constantly staring at Will's grins and laughs, how he frolicked with such merry contentment among his pack of former strays, kicking up snow-sprays and skips in Hannibal's heartbeat.

They had bickered fondly and predictably, both in choosing a new (very large) leather couch for the study, and in purchasing a trunk-ful and then some of Christmas decorations. Hannibal kept gravitating towards the gothic, everything spiny and pointy in shades of black and maroon or blood purple, nothing particularly *Christmassy*, so that Will chuckled they weren't Halloween shopping and held up ornaments of dogs and fish, sparkling tinsel and snowmen that (to Hannibal's irritated consternation) sang carols and danced when you pushed a button. Will intentionally went for over-the-top cheesy items just to goad his stuck-up lover, while Hannibal caught onto this finally, sneaking belly tickles and extra-sneaky spankings in the aisles of the Christmas Tree Shop.

He let Will fill the big cart up with absolutely anything that caught his cheery and mischievous eye, including mistletoe for every room, large light-up candy canes for the front lawn that would earn them an evil eye from the snobby neighbors, miles worth of fairy lights in every color, a candle that smelled of what Will called "Christmas Magic," pine needles, cinnamon and spice.

"Everything nice," Hannibal had grinned, fangs gleaming because he could not resist Will at his most relaxed and playful.

They kissed, Will leaned over the cart, Hannibal dangling a sprig of mistletoe above them and rubbing his thumb over the curve of his boy's cheek, and over the speakers of the crowded store, the Carpenters sang "Merry Christmas Darling."

Here and now, with Hannibal the amazing Snow-Shoveler standing before Will with an expression of unintentionally hilarious determination, the younger man stretched, scratching his low belly where Hannibal's gaze immediately flew because his soft sage green sweater had shifted above the waistband of his grey sweatpants.

"Why don't I come out and show you how it's done, honey?" Will asked casually, pretending not to observe either a) Hannibal's aggravation at the mild and unspoken implication he wasn't up for the snow shoveling job alone, or b) the coffee-hued eyes raking up and down his body with constant sensuous yearning.

“I’m quite...that is, if you insist. I can handle it, if you would prefer to remain comfortably ensconced with your book and cocoa. There are fresh scones in the pantry.”

“White chocolate cranberry, I know. But they can wait.” Will slinked up to his adorably gorgeous lover and looped his arms around his neck. “Have you ever shoveled your own driveway, especially after this much snow? Don’t you normally hire someone to do that while you drink brandy and eat foie gras a la recent victim while listening to *Carmen*?”

“I prefer *L'Orfeo* or *Dido and Aeneas* to *Carmen,*” Hannibal retorted, “And the ‘victim’ foie gras is best accompanied by a nice cabernet. Otherwise, your assumption holds true.”

“Hmm, thought so.” Will met Hannibal’s soft smile, tilting his head looking up at him while Daddy’s hands sank into the back pockets of his sweatpants and squeezed his ass.

“I’ll miss you if you go out there alone.” Will pouted and played with Hannibal’s coat collar, going up on tiptoes to brush a kiss to his lips.

“Show me the ropes then, mylimasis.” Hannibal gave in as he always did, besotted and with twinkling eyes, forgetting his wounded pride and insistence on knowing everything / being the best at every possible task.

Will grinned, kissed him again, and went to the coat closet in the foyer, retrieving his own coat, hat and gloves, plus an extra hat for Hannibal.

The Chesapeake Ripper sneered momentarily at the logo of “The North Face” on the heavy blue beanie hat which Will passed him, but once they were outside he realized how warm it kept his ears as the icy air assaulted them right away.

They spent about as much time with Will demonstrating the most effective ways to clear the driveway, as they did having a snowball fight, laughing hysterically while tears ran down Hannibal’s cheeks and he pelted the snow at his sweet boy, cherry-faced with cold, exercise and giggles.

The job was done admirably well, and they were all set for an easy journey to Wolf Trap tomorrow. After an hour of work and play found them soaking, freezing, lungs tired from laughter and limbs aching from exertion, they went inside, fed the dogs and took a hot shower, kissing sloppily and joking about who won the snowball fight.

Hannibal made them a light late dinner of various festive and scrumptious appetizers, a trio of crostinis with different yummy toppings to finish the perfect crunch, bacon cheddar bread twists which Will was in serious danger of getting addicted to, honey-almond baked brie and fresh winter fruit, berries and plums that melted into the taste of the wine which the older man had opened. Apparently, it was an especially famed and old bottle of merlot, but all Will knew was the sweetly spiced flavor of cocoa, cherries, and molasses, and the light in Hannibal’s eyes when he explained it all in his usual sage, show-offy manner.

Will loved his egotistical ramblings and could have listened all night. Especially as they had made themselves a Christmas picnic in the study, eating on a plush white blanket spread right next to their absurdly huge, wonderfully decorated tree. Especially when they licked

suggestively at each other's fingers while sharing bites of food or kissed the wine from each other's eager lips, Will's pj-clad leg flung over Hannibal's, his head happily snuggled on his lover's shoulder while the historic origins of French wine-making poured as enthusiastically from Hannibal.

"Tell me more," Will said dreamily.

Chapter End Notes

A couple of refs for Hannigram's small-couch-struggle cuddling positions: https://www.askmen.com/sex/sex_positions/best-cuddling-positions.html (#6)

https://www.cnn.com/2015/02/10/living/gallery/cuddling-positions-cuddle-con-irpt/index.html (2/10)

Will's bunny lingerie: https://www.amazon.com/Kiyester-Kawaii-Pajamas-Bloomers-Sleepwear/dp/B094Q9NKDY/ref=sr_1_5?dchild=1&keywords=kawaii+bunny+lingerie&qid=1625068421&sr=8-5

Of course, Hannibal would purchase this at a much higher quality and price; this is just an image ref 😉🐰

And that thong-thong-thong-thong-thong: 🎼 https://www.amazon.com/ADESUGATA-Womens-G-String-Cosplay-Underwear/dp/B07X1Q42NF/ref=sr_1_2?dchild=1&keywords=bunny+thong&qid=1625068438&sr=8-2

Merry Christmas, Darling

Chapter Notes

> Okay, the Christmas Day chapter ended up being too long for one installment, but given the cliffhanger this chapter ends on, I'll be posting the next one right after. Enjoy! ❤️

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal woke even earlier than usual on Christmas morning, but that was because Will was excited like a little boy who believed Santa had come and wanted to open his gifts.

Except in this case, the gift was Hannibal. Will roused his lover by straddling him in bed, smirking down at his sleepy face while caramel eyes fluttered open to take in the sight of his boy's Rudolph sweater.

Hannibal could only assume this was the most atrocious of the many Rudolph sweaters which Will had perused before making his prophesied selection. White, bold letters shouted "Merry Christmas" against a bright red background, while the reindeer's grinning face was accented by a glittering ruby pom-pom.

The sweater was all Will had on, apart from a pair of soft thigh high socks featuring candy cane stripes, then Rudolph's cheerful likeness again at the top, along with small gold jingle bells.

The Ripper groaned and palmed Will's ass, immediately drawing his boy down for a voracious kiss, his cock already enormously engorged in mornings, now aching even more firmly, leaking through his black silk pajama pants and meeting Will's own mounting hardness while they kissed harder and gasped.

Hannibal gripped at Will's curls, spanked him briskly with muttered Lithuanian curses that made his naughty lover giggle. He flipped Will roughly over, sleepiness forgotten as he pulled and manhandled the beautiful younger man onto his hands and knees, yanking his own pants down to release his throbbing length. Thoroughly enjoying the way Will cried out in pleasure while he lavished his tongue wildly over the profiler's hole, Hannibal had to occasionally reach down and stroke himself to ease the unbelievable heated pulse of his need.

Will moaned out a panting "Merry Christmas, Daddy," as Hannibal sank his lubed, thick cock deep inside hot, slick tightness and smacked his hips to Will's soft, pretty ass.

The older man grabbed a handful of Will's sweater and used it for yanking leverage as he fucked hard, harder with every one of Will's whimpering yelps, harder with his balls bouncing off the underside of Will's ass and Will clutching at the pillow, mewling. Harder while the cute jingle bells on Will's thigh highs chimed with every brutally pleasuring thrust, until he came on a hoarse growl and Will spilled into his own fist, red-faced, curls matted

with sweat, both of them knowing this was not only the best way to start their Christmas, but only the first of many such moments they would share to celebrate the occasion, to celebrate each other.

“Fuck, Hannibal,” Will panted haphazardly, sprawled on his back afterwards, softening cock still oh-so-pretty between his thighs.

Hannibal smirked, sitting no less spent beside Will, stroking his socks, adjusting their position hugging Will’s thighs. Content with the sight, he flopped beside Will on his side, head supported on his elbow, blonde-silver strands falling across his warm cinnamon eyes. His cheekbones looked carved from marble as he reached out to caress Will’s face, then stroke his bicep.

“What’s it like?” Will murmured, something very tender and dear enveloping his raspy, fucked-out tone with deeper emotion. “Being completely perfect. How does that feel, anyway?”

Hannibal smiled just as softly and shrugged one of his impossibly elegant shrugs, ever debonair, even naked, sweat-streaked and musky with cum, or maybe even more so. He was so natural, comfortable in his own skin and with Will, it was a wonder to behold.

“I don’t know,” Hannibal answered, voice husky and intent. Gently, he shifted position to hover over Will, stroking wet curls back from his face, letting their naked chests brush together, smooth to hairy, pounding heartbeats pressed and joined.

“You’ll have to ask my lover,” Hannibal added, kissing Will’s rosebud lips, three times quickly and softly. He stroked Will’s hipbone and said with rapturous worship, “He’s perfect.”

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“Don’t drink the eggnog,” Travis whispered secretively as he took Hannibal’s coat after Dr. Lecter and Will had arrived at the Grahams’ house, lingering for greetings in the kitchen. “Everything else she makes is fantastic, but the eggnog’s terrible and she won’t hear reason--”

“If he’s warning you about my Granny Phillis’ outstanding eggnog recipe, rest assured he’s full of it as usual,” Maddie called over her shoulder. She was across the room, leaning down to check on the turkey roasting in the oven.

Hannibal’s eyes flickered confusedly back and forth between Will’s parents. He loved flattering them both to try and stay in their good graces, but now was in the precarious position of following Travis’ advice or trusting Maddie’s eggnog-making skills.

Before his brain could short circuit, Will laughed and said, “Buzz off, Dad, we’re just going to have some mulled cider to start. We had wine when we exchanged presents earlier, and I don’t want to get too tipsy this early in the day.”

“Excellent selection, Will,” Maddie beamed, adorably welcoming in her Ruldoph apron, ladling spiced hot apple cider from a slow cooker which was only one of six crammed onto the counter by the stove.

The kitchen was done up in red gingham with motifs of country roosters on the curtains and dish towels. There was very little space to spare for much, yet every nook and cranny was carefully utilized with admirable organization. Hannibal also had no doubt that the chubby snowman cookie jar nestled into the back corner of the counter was chock-full of homemade goodies.

As Mrs. Graham poured the cider into two mugs with happy cartoon Santas on them, Hannibal cast his lover one small, pointed look that said ‘the apple didn’t fall far from the tree.’

Will read his expression like a book, as he so often did, and snorted an affectionate chuckle before taking the huge mug of cider from his mother and passing one to Hannibal. Will blew on his hot drink, automatically moving out of the way when Travis bustled by carrying Will and Hannibal’s coats and the various gift bags they had brought.

“Coats’ll be on the bed in the guest room,” Travis called dutifully.

“Nice eggnog evasion,” he muttered to Hannibal, who endeavored to look almost extravagantly innocent.

“That’ll be enough outta you if you think you’re getting a glazed drumstick, mister,” Maddie yelled after her husband, who had disappeared into the hall.

“I’m not really mad,” she said to Hannibal and Will, waving off the notion as she stirred butter and milk into mashed potatoes.

She only needed to pay fifty percent attention to her ongoing multitasking cookery to know exactly what she was doing. The kitchen was fragrant with buttery herbs from the turkey, and the roast looked nearly ready, skin expertly crisped.

“Look.” Maddie thrust her free hand out and showed off a new ring, a small but dazzling emerald surrounded by tiny diamonds. “Trav gave me this last night when we exchanged stockings. New bling means a man gets to be obnoxious whenever he wants for at least a few weeks. That’s the rule, right, Will?”

She winked and Will grinned, rolling up the sleeves of his berry-red cardigan sweater, soft as could be in finest cashmere, and worn over a crisp white dress shirt, open collar showing off his pretty throat, continually catching Hannibal’s eyes. Will’s hickies were barely concealed. His charcoal, fitted trousers clung fetchingly to his slim frame, and Hannibal could not stop staring, even while trying to make pleasant conversation in his ongoing quest to impress Mrs. Graham with his ideal suitability as Will’s future husband.

He tugged on his new silk black bow tie, which he wore paired with a green and black plaid suit jacket and cranberry trousers. Both of them were dressed head to toe in gifts from the other, including the thin, brown leather stranded necklace around Will’s neck with its small,

real working solid gold compass, and a complimenting Versace braided leather bracelet with a golden charm of Medusa at its center. His boy, the storm and the calm all in one scrumptiously unpredictable package, deserved absolutely nothing but the finest.

“That’s the rule,” Will smirked, showing his own “new bling” to Maddie, who cooed at the lovely pieces and complimented a blushing, pleased Hannibal accordingly.

Will’s smugness at being spoiled never failed to make Hannibal want to swoon, but he held himself together as best he could and offered to help Maddie with any food preparations or other assistance that might be needed.

“She’ll say no, then sometime later today when you least expect it, she’ll have something for you to do,” Will predicted, crossing his arms over his torso in a manner Hannibal considered downright unfair. He leaned back against the counter, easily evading his mother’s predictable swat at his arm.

“You and your Dad are two peas in a pod with that nonsense, I am *not* that predictable.” She ran a hand over the greying brunette hair attractively piled on her head and fastened with a clip, her feathery bangs bouncing as she glanced around considering Hannibal’s offer. “Hmm, I think I *am* all set for now, Hannibal, but I’ll keep you posted if anything comes up. With a gourmet like you around, I’m kinda nervous about my menu. I hope you’ll enjoy it.”

“Mrs. Graham,” Hannibal assured her warmly, taking her hands in his as Will watched him, infatuated all over again at the way his partner respected and admired his mother. “You could just as well serve me Will’s beloved ‘Spaghettios,’ and I could not be more delighted to be here celebrating the holidays. However, past experience tells me I am in for quite a treat. You are a gourmet yourself. Merely humble about the subject where I am...not.”

He winked and Maddie laughed. “You *are* gonna keep this one, right, Will?”

Will gave them a slow, Southern smile, sweet like honey. “Yeah, that’s right. I am.”

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“Gonna keep you cause you’re mine, Daddy,” Will grunted, feral, under his breath, a few minutes later when he sneakily shoved Hannibal into his parents’ guest room and locked the door behind them, planning to mask a stolen quickie with the loud ongoing clang of pots and pans in the kitchen and Travis singing along to the George Strait Christmas album in the living room while he arranged and rearranged the gifts under the tree. Everyone was picky about *something,* and Will was choosy about how long he had to wait to take Hannibal, body and soul.

“Will,” Hannibal whispered, a bit concerned but no less rock hard in his pants as Will pushed him down on the bed and climbed on top of him, smothering him in hot kisses right next to the pile of their coats. “I don’t want to risk your parents wondering where we’ve gone to and their approval in me flagging…”

“Know what *isn’t* flagging?” Will growled, palming the impressive bulge in Hannibal’s pants, then unzipping them and tugging them down with no further preamble.

He had Hannibal's dick deep in his mouth, slickly bobbing his head with expert skill that under the circumstances was excruciating -- Hannibal bit his own hand to stay quiet as his eyes rolled back and Will swirled his tongue around the head of his cock before deep-throating him.

The older man came as his hips convulsed up against Will's rapturously reddened face, tears streaking from the boy's bright blue eyes at the exertion and strain on his throat, and Hannibal lay there in shock, shivering with afterglow pleasure for several minutes before he murmured, "Come here," reaching for his boy. Will stripped his pants off before sitting on Hannibal's face.

Hannibal clutched Will's ass, leaving new bruises as he ate his hole out with insatiable joy. Will groaned, stroking his cock in time with the quickening lashes of Hannibal's tongue, getting him right to the edge. Then the doctor pressed his tongue inside his lover's sweet, velvety heaven and Will stroked his cock faster. The profiler orgasmed, kaleidoscopic waves of intense bliss obviously taking him over. Hannibal could tell by the way he covered the blue plaid guest bed blanket in sticky cum, whining Hannibal's name, barely stifling the urge to be louder.

"*Whoops,*" Will lamented, glancing down at the blanket. He laughed anyway, got up and flung his Christmas boxers back on, then his pants, while Hannibal stood beside him doing the same, both of them wobbly-legged and blushing with residual, lingering trembles of pleasure.

"I'll move the coats," Hannibal suggested strategically.

He went to the closet and hung the coats as Will stripped the blanket from the bed and crept into the adjoining bathroom, washing the splotched part of the quilt pretty thoroughly in the sink before depositing it in the laundry hamper.

"That'll do for now," Will determined. "C'mon, lover, Christmas isn't half done with you yet."

They emerged to find a gorgeous feast laid out on the kitchen table. An eve insert had been added to extend the table and allow for two guests, but the table in this configuration barely fit in the confines of the small eat-in dining area. Travis had cracked the screen door to the backyard open, since despite the cold weather, the kitchen was hot from the oven.

The two guests were hot from other things, Will's sweater left behind in the guest room, Hannibal's suit jacket placed now over the back of his chair, both of them with rolled-up sleeves, messier hair than earlier, and sheepish looks politely ignored by the Grahams, who hadn't had nearly enough holiday liquor to have to wonder what "the boys" had just been doing.

"*Ahem*, red or white wine with dinner, dears?" Maddie inquired, barely covering a laugh at the lovers' embarrassed expressions.

Hannibal would have been anything but embarrassed, and indeed quite obnoxiously smug about fucking his beautiful boyfriend wherever and whenever he wanted -- if they were

anywhere else in the world.

He managed to smile politely and request, “Red, please, Mrs. Graham, and thank you so much. What an absolutely magnificent meal you have prepared.”

He pulled out Will’s chair for him, every detail of the doctor’s elegant, gentlemanly comportment in the tiny kitchen reflecting the same dapper attitude he would display at the fanciest and most exclusive restaurant. The table was so overcrowded with serving plates of food that there was barely enough room for each person’s plate, napkin, silverware and wine glass.

“Red for me, too, please, Mom,” Will requested, shooting Hannibal a coy look and nudging his foot under the table.

He had certainly gotten over his share of the embarrassment quickly, Hannibal observed while still metabolizing his mild state of mortification.

Travis stood across the table hovering over the big, steaming turkey with a large knife and fork for slicing. Though busy, he still noticed how Hannibal always pulled Will’s chair out for him and made sure his lover had everything he could want before he himself ever ate a morsel. Even amidst his typical, dryly comedic antics, Mr. Graham gave Hannibal a brief, heartfelt smile of appreciation and respect.

“I can already count a half-dozen recipes I’ll soon be asking you for, Mrs. Graham, as I observe the table’s contents.”

Hannibal spoke sincerely, but he was being so generous with the flattery in his crusade to impress the Grahams that Will rolled his eyes and bumped his shoulder fondly with his own.

“Stop being so damn cute or you’ll end up in the guest room again,” Will whispered, making Hannibal’s cheeks flame.

“Aw, you’ll turn my head, do go on,” Maddie urged affably, responding to Hannibal’s compliment.

She sat down across the table from her son and stirred the gravy in its serving bowl shaped like Santa’s sleigh as Travis struggled quite audibly with slicing the glistening, delicious-smelling turkey.

“It’s so tender! Why is it so hard to cut,” Travis complained, “*Every damn year.*”

“I can offer your father some guidance,” Hannibal murmured to Will, whose hand shot out to still him from getting up to give a doubtless detailed and helpful mini tutorial on turkey slicing.

“Shh, sit down and relax,” Will instructed under his breath. “This is part of the Christmas entertainment. He gets grumpier about it every year.”

“I goddamn heard that, son,” Travis groused. “Just wait, this is going to be the best job I ever did.”

It ended up a hack job, but that didn't matter. Every bite of the turkey was perfectly seasoned and paired wonderfully with the whipped potatoes, cranberry sauce and stuffing. And Travis got his beloved drumstick, soon forgetting his grumbles over the turkey-slicing struggle as the favorite food and indulgent servings of wine had him sentimentally babbling, true to form.

"Now tell me, Hannibal, what's your favorite Christmas album?" Travis asked when he was on his second glass of shiraz and eagerly buttering a fresh-baked dinner roll, again looking the picture of an older Will with his soft beard, sharp jawline and red-green flannel shirt.

"In past years, I would occasionally condescend to a bit of Bach's Christmas Oratorio," Hannibal revealed, pausing in eating his meal with his spoon above his potatoes and gravy.

Travis groaned, but Hannibal flashed his fangs in a cute grin as he continued, "However, Will has recently introduced me to…*The Charlie Brown Christmas Special,* which has quite a pleasantly ethereal accompanying score."

"There you go," Travis approved, "Classic! Me, I'll take the Kenny and Dolly album anytime, but Maddie's a sucker for the Bublé."

"They always say *the Bublé*," Will confided, laughing with a forkful of turkey in his hand. "As if the man represents an entire, world-defining genre unto himself."

"Anyone who claims they dislike the Michael Bublé Christmas album is deluding themselves," Mrs. Graham put in, gesturing with a spoonful of whole-berry, bright red cranberry sauce.

"I didn't say I disliked the Buble," Will added, "It's not bad."

"Naw, it's alright," Travis allowed. "In moderation."

"No taste, Hannibal," Maddie sighed, "I ask you, why do I put up with these heathens?"

"Patience of a saint," Will smirked, and his mother nodded her agreement, indicating this was a phrase she frequently used to describe herself.

"A *saint,* I tell you," she repeated, laughing when Travis chose the next moment she looked at him to cross his eyes and stick his tongue out.

Hannibal looked back and forth between Will's parents, often almost scientifically fascinated by the way the small family interacted, in a breezy flow of affectionate good humor.

There was no hint of enmity, no impossible-to-decode resentments served alongside Christmas dinner. Nobody drank themselves into a wrathful stupor and insulted their relatives. There were no *rules* as to conduct or expectation, and Hannibal was free as any of them to be himself (to a certain point, of course, precluding any murderous references). That was all anyone here wanted. It could not have been more different from any holiday he had forced himself under duress and obligation to "share" with his own remaining family.

This was as strange and novel an experience to Hannibal as it was a welcome and humbling one.

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In order to “let their tummies settle” after the big feast, Maddie proposed to go into the living room for a bit of relaxation and gift exchanging.

Hannibal settled into the same overstuffed, shabby chic floral armchair he had occupied when he visited to secretly ask for Will’s hand in marriage, but this time his lover was right beside him, easily sinking onto the arm of the chair in his by-now accustomed position for when they were around friends and family, and lap-sitting might be a *bit* much. As usual, Hannibal wrapped an arm around Will’s waist and settled his hand on his hip. Will’s eyes sparkled brighter than any Christmas lights Hannibal could imagine as he smiled down at him with just a hint of red wine clinging to his tempting lips, a half-full glass casually perched in his hand. He winked at Hannibal, then squeezed his knee with his free hand; everything seemed to have transcended to a place beyond perfect, and Hannibal could have stayed right in that moment forever with no regrets.

To imagine that within a few days, he would be down on one knee, offering a stunning diamond ring to Will along with the chance to spend the rest of their lives together as husbands, it elevated Hannibal’s heart rate and body heat, it made him slightly dizzy. How could this joy truly be his, touchable, so much more happiness in easy reach?

So often, since meeting Will, he thought he must be dreaming.

Travis interrupted his thought tangent, which had been heavy but sweet, perhaps too serious for this particular time of festive good humor. Hannibal was grateful for the distraction, as he wanted to live in the moment with Will rather than concerning himself overly with future or past, previous difficulties he was trying to avoid.

“This must be for you,” Travis grinned, passing Hannibal his Christmas stocking, then giving Will his with a dramatic eye roll. “And Will, I’m sure this is full of coal.”

“Santa wouldn’t do me like that,” Will smirked, putting his wine glass down on the side table and fishing his hand into his stocking, pulling out a pair of socks with a pattern of dogs in Santa hats. “Ah, see that? The big guy always comes through.”

Will swung his legs cheerfully back and forth as Hannibal gave him a puzzled look. “The big guy?”

“Santa,” said Will in a theatrical whisper. “Maddie and Travis’ll never admit he’s not real, not upon pain of death. Just go along with it.”

“I see,” Hannibal chuckled, “And is there any particular order in which I should remove items from this stocking?”

“Naw, you just go for it, son,” Travis assured him, settling across from them on the couch beside Maddie. “I usually dump mine all over the rug--”

“Which is shameful,” Maddie reproved, but her gaze upon her husband was quite unmistakably adoring.

“I like a cornucopia,” Travis clarified in his own defense, resting a hand over his heart. “I enjoy seeing all my bounty spread out before me at once.”

They continued debating the subject as Hannibal began on his own stocking. He held it in his lap, feeling the weight of various, unknown gifts inside, breathing in the scent of the nearby tree, fresh and piney, glancing out the window at the snowy yard and ice-white afternoon sky. The world seemed asleep, dreaming splendid wonders, except for the neighbor’s children who were out testing a doubtless brand new sled down the hill beside the Grahams’ house.

He was inside someone else’s idyllic snow globe life, again embraced by the surreal.

Will took out a bottle of Old Spice from his stocking and downright guffawed. “Oh, look honey, my annual stock has been replenished. Aren’t you glad?”

“It will smell wonderfully as it cascades down the sink drain,” Hannibal returned under his breath, still blushing with his various sensations of disbelief at this domestic scene that somehow included him. But he could never resist one of his and Will’s many inside jokes.

“Bastard,” Will snarked, laughing. “Come on, what’s in yours? Let’s see.”

“Ah,” Hannibal noted, removing each small and entirely normal stocking stuffer as if it was priceless treasure, fascinating, this inside glimpse of how “the other half” lived, how he apparently lived now. No trifling adjustment, that.

“Hand sanitizer,” he narrated, placing each gift on the table by his side of the chair, forming a neat row. “Festive socks, much like your own.”

“Santa must have thought you were a little more of a cat-man,” Maddie winked as Hannibal turned the warm-feeling socks over in his hands, examining the frightfully tacky pattern of adorable orange kittens in hats and scarves, accompanied by the phrase *“Meowy Christmas.”*

He almost wanted to hug those socks.

Will watched him, smiling, enamored at Hannibal’s type A method of going through this simple ritual. “What else,” he prompted, placing a magnetic key case and a pack of felt-tip pens on his own side table.

“Aha,” Hannibal remarked politely, studying a solid square box of chocolates which said “Whitman’s Sampler” and had a grinning Snoopy on the front wrapper. “Endorsed by Snoopy himself. I’m sure this will be delicious.”

“Yeah, those are pretty good, see if you got a Lifesaver Storybook, too. I got one,” Will bragged, showing off the cardboard “book” in his hand.

Hannibal found a matching “storybook” in his own stocking, and discovered that the box opened in the middle to provide a brief holiday story regarding a surprise encounter with “Old Saint Nick,” and two rows of new lifesaver candy rolls.

“Isn’t this intended for children?” he whispered to Will, who shook his head and kissed Hannibal’s cheek, murmuring in his ear.

“That’s the point, love. Everyone’s a kid at Christmas.”

“Santa never forgets the lifesaver storybooks!” Maddie enthused, contentedly looking back and forth between “the boys” opening their stockings, and the movie playing in the background.

The small tv on the chest next to the tree was playing *It’s a Wonderful Life* on low volume, in a soothing hum, and George Bailey was currently running through the snow, looking as lost and terrified as Hannibal felt found.

“*All I know is this should be Bailey Park*,” Travis talked along with the movie, clearly having seen it many dozens of times.

Hannibal explored the remaining surprises in his soft red stocking with more relaxed understanding. He discovered a new toothbrush, a packet of dried meat sticks (?) called “Slim Jims,” gum, and “Working Man’s” hand cream in a green tin container.

“This stuff is awesome,” Will enthused, “Great for after I’ve been working on Nola.”

Hannibal smiled, intrigued at his boy’s ongoing project of building his own boat. He could only imagine where they might sail together someday, just the two of them and for as long as they liked.

“Okay, time for y’all to open our presents,” Will determined.

He stood, ruffling Hannibal’s hair first, then strode to the tree, retrieving the small pile of gifts they had selected together for the Grahams.

Hannibal wondered when the sound of Will’s honeyed drawl and application of Louisiana colloquialisms would cease to send shivers down his spine as warm desire spiked in his low belly. He had a not-so-sneaking suspicion the answer to that was “never.”

“Aww, y’all didn’t have to get us anything,” Travis insisted, “The gift of having you both in our lives is more than, well okay, if we *have* to.”

He eagerly tore into the gift box Will had passed him. “Oh, perfect,” Maddie giggled as her husband pulled out a sweater with a scowling Grinch on it from the tissue paper.

“Looks warm,” Travis shrugged. “Think I’m not fixin’ to put it on right now, think again.”

He tugged the sweater on over his flannel and patted his slightly rounded belly. “Fits like a charm. Thanks, boys.”

“Anytime, Mr. Graham,” Hannibal nodded, ever formal, earning himself another charmed, besotted glance from Will when the younger man returned to his perch on the arm of “their” chair.

“Oh, how lovely,” Maddie cooed when she had reached into her gift back to reveal a cashmere scarf, hat and gloves set, the scarf accented by a jeweled brooch. “So pretty, thank you, my dears.”

Following suit to Travis’ behavior, she looped the scarf around her neck immediately.

“It looks ravishing, Mrs. Graham.” Hannibal threaded his fingers through Will’s and watched his boy pop a chocolate from his sampler box into his mouth, looking at the movie, George Bailey begging Clarence the angel for answers. Will rubbed his thumb absent-mindedly over Hannibal’s.

The working of Will’s stubbled, perfect jaw and the way he licked his sumptuous lips with a low, appreciative hum at the candy had Hannibal in a bit of a haze, but he roused when Maddie rose from the couch and pointed at her son.

“No more candy for now, Will, I’m about to go get dessert ready. Save your appetite.”

Will shrugged, lightly tapped the lid back on the chocolate box, started a conversation with Travis about fishing that Hannibal could barely follow. He really was going to make “an ass” of himself when he inevitably allowed himself to be coerced into going fishing with Will, but even that he knew would be strangely delightful. The idea of Will instructing him with a firm, perhaps overly present and wandering hand, hovering behind Hannibal in the water, demonstrating how to hold the rod and cast off, et cetera, it did have its own not indistinct appeal.

“Hannibal, honey, will you come and give me a hand in the kitchen?” Maddie asked. “These two are gonna be blabbing about flies and waders and trout and I’m liable to fall asleep in the process. Feels like coffee and pie time.”

“I told you,” Will murmured to his lover, since Maddie had indeed professed not needing any assistance, then later found something for Hannibal to do.

Hannibal wondered what it must be like to understand one’s parents so well. Or at all, for that matter.

“Heard that,” Maddie snipped merrily.

“Of course I’m only too delighted to assist,” Hannibal volunteered, pleased at the privilege of being the preferred helper in this instance.

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“That’s a very handsome pie, Mrs. Graham,” Hannibal observed, genuinely impressed when Will’s mother, with infinite care, removed a large pie from the refrigerator, then slid it onto the counter where the slow cookers had been unplugged and set aside on the table to make room for the dessert “spread.”

“Oh, thank you, honey, I’m glad you think so.” Maddie opened a Tupperware containing chocolate shavings and scattered them delicately over the soft peaks of pure white meringue

already flecked in coconut wisps. “Will you put the coffee on? Just fill the pot and hit the big button on the front.”

Hannibal obeyed, studious in every small errand, yet mildly confused as to why she had requested his presence. There seemed to be no pressing need for his assistance.

“This is called a White Christmas Pie. I got the recipe from a friend at a church social supper, oh twenty years ago now.”

Maddie looked up at Hannibal then, very discerning. “I know you must be like Will.”

“Like him in what sense?”

A bit baffled by the sudden, serious turn in her comments and expression, Hannibal pressed the button and set the coffee pot quietly brewing with a slow drip that soon grew more persistent while steam exuded lightly from the appliance, the smell of bitterly nutty, simple but fortifying Folgers’ filling the air.

“You kill people. Don’t you?” Maddie put one hand on her hip, casting him an analytical look.

Chapter End Notes

Tis the damn cliffhanger! 😱

I'm sure you might want to just click on by to the next chapter, but in case anyone is interested, I'll include some image refs below for some of the things in this one.

Image refs:

Will’s reindeer sweater and socks: https://www.sriusan.com/index.php?main_page=product_info&products_id=293562

https://kawaiibabe.com/products/reindeer-thigh-highs

Will’s Christmas Dinner outfit and jewelry: https://kallspin.com/products/v-neck-cashmere-sweater-cardigan

https://www.etsy.com/listing/1014443373/18k-gold-iced-out-compass-pendant-chain?ga_order=most_relevant&ga_search_type=all&ga_view_type=gallery&ga_search_query=men+compass+necklace&ref=sc_gallery-2-9&plkey=2755a61050f2cf4328e86ea80fab72d5e738d033%3A1014443373&frs=1

https://www.versace.com/us/en-us/medusa-leather-bracelet-d41o/DG05579-DMTN_DTU_UNICA_D41O__.html?lgw_code=16402-DG05579-DMTN_DTU_UNICA_D41O__&&wt_mc=us.shopping.google.link.shopping&gclid=C

jwKCAjwrPCGBhALEiwAUl9X06cPi9chDojhL5jC3BfQ8BHrDROUEMM8bQrJnxg0bTA-dP2PXfhnXxoCDAoQAvD_BwE&gclsrc=aw.ds

Hannibal’s Christmas Dinner outfit: https://www.pinterest.com/pin/229965124698768355/

Lifesaver's Christmas Storybook: https://www.candywarehouse.com/lifesavers-candy-christmas-storybook

White Christmas pie: https://www.justapinch.com/recipes/dessert/pie/white-christmas-pie.html

Wrapped in Red

Chapter Notes

cw: brief reference to animal abuse and death, non-graphic reference to past sexual assault of a supporting character.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal's jaw dropped and sweat gathered on his palms. "Mrs. Graham…"

He was not an easy man to surprise, but he truly felt the rug had been well and fully pulled from underneath him this time.

"You must," she said, placing a stack of red and green cloth napkins next to the petite plates intended for the pie.

As she opened a drawer and took out a sizeable pie cutter without apparently the least dread that her son's lover might attack her for the accusation, Hannibal frowned, pressed his lips together, fretted inwardly.

"Otherwise the two of you couldn't have bonded like you are," she went on, almost breezily, expertly dividing the pie into perfect slice cuts for easy serving. "Hannibal, stop staring at me like a canary who just swallowed a mouse too fat to digest and get me the jar of maraschino cherries from the fridge."

"Anyway," she persisted, taking the cold jar of candied fruit from Hannibal's outstretched hand a few moments later, essentially ignoring his continued look of "canary with indigestion."

She set the cherries next to the pie and paused to think, hands pressed to the counter, nails painted in a candy cane manicure. "The intimacy between you and Will is palpable, and it's nothing like the way he's been with anyone else he's dated. You can *see* him, can't you? All of him, without judgement, without fear."

"Yes." Hannibal allowed pretenses to drop.

Although he was still stalled on the very notion of Maddie knowing that Will was a killer but not, apparently, having ever told Will or anyone else of this knowledge, she did not seem to be angry or horrified by the facts she mentioned.

"Far as I've ever seen it, the only way to reach that level of perfect intimacy is understanding. Mirroring, essentially. So, I deduce you must do what Will does. You go after abusers like he does?"

“Sometimes,” Hannibal said frankly.

He did not even bother glancing at the knives in the butcher block holder behind Maddie, nor the efficacy of any other method for silencing Will’s mother. His respect and admiration for the woman forbade any such measure, as did his solemn devotion to her son. In a sense, he now found himself in Mrs. Graham’s power. Panic and confusion mingled with shock and he still struggled to catch up, either to her statements or his own reactions.

“More often, now that I’m with Will,” he added. “And he has no idea, I presume, that you know about this side of him?”

“No, and don’t you dare breathe a word of it,” Maddie answered, adding an ice cream scoop and an assortment of brightly colored, small bowls to the dessert offerings on the counter. “I’m going to serve this up buffet style, let y’all serve yourselves. Nice and laid back that way, don’t you think?”

“Yes, but--”

“Right, everyone can take what they like and eat in the living room.” Maddie nodded, confirming the plan with a hostess’s serious focus. “Hannibal, I just need someone I can talk to about this. I’ve been alone with this secret for so many years. It would shatter Will to know I know, he would be horrified. And Travis...he couldn’t handle it. He’d be so scared and worried. I always knew I couldn’t tell him.”

“Understandable,” Hannibal allowed. “I am certainly willing to be your confidante, Mrs. Graham.”

She sighed, sitting down at the table and gesturing for him to do the same. The coffee went on sputtering into the pot and the muffled sound of the movie in the living room blended with Will and Travis laughing their way through an amicable argument about fishing.

“I’m proud of my boy, so proud. What is does is extraordinary. He’s a protector, first and foremost, always was. But you see, he needs to believe I’ll always see him as that innocent kid.”

“The boy who knows Santa will always put Lifesavers and chocolates in his stocking,” Hannibal nodded. “That is Will as well. But the darkness is something in him he wishes to protect you from.”

“And I can’t take that away from him,” Maddie said firmly. “If you two ever have children, you’ll see...there’s nothing you wouldn’t do to give them what it is they need.”

“Then you are a protector as well.”

Hannibal rested a hand on the table, feeling the thin fabric of the holiday cloth covering atop it, slightly worn from many washings yet probably reused each year as a nostalgic tradition.

His intelligent brown eyes rested on Maddie’s conflicted, earnest face with an equal lack of judgement, either for her decisions or Will’s. He allowed himself to be there to listen for now,

without pressing any questions of his own.

“He always had it in him, ain’t nobody’s fault or nobody’s place to judge,” Maddie recalled tensely.

She had slipped into a more frequent use of slang as her emotions heightened, her accent getting stronger as her voice was strained.

“Will had this awful, mean brat of a cousin, *Montgomery*, Travis’ sister named him. Monty was born cruel the way Will was born kind and brave, and prone to punish the wicked. Bad combination.”

“I can imagine.”

“One time I found Will holding Monty’s head underwater in the creek near our house. He was twelve, Monty was eleven. See, that little terror had gone and suffocated a litter of wild kittens in the woods down there. Will had been bringing the mama food for weeks, but those type of cats don’t wanna live indoors with people, they’re meant to be free. He knew that and loved them. Monty just wanted to know what the kittens would look like dead and if he could really do it.”

Hannibal’s blood ran cold.

“Will would have killed him, there’s never been a doubt in my mind about it. I stopped him, sent Monty home to get the whupping of a lifetime once his mama heard what he done, and that child was too terrified ever to mention what Will did. Will fell on the ground *cryin’*...”

She massaged her forehead, wincing at the vivid memory. “And I just held him. He didn’t mean to do it, he couldn’t help himself. He hates people who hurt animals, could never tolerate it. Later, he got to hatin’ those who hurt anyone, anything innocent, and it’s been woe betide ‘em ever since.”

“That much, I supposed must be the case,” Hannibal revealed, still processing all of the new information. Here it was, the chance to learn about Will’s boyhood in more detail, for which he had always yearned. Yet there was a strange discomfort, however irresistible and important the secrets he gained, in hearing all of this from Maddie instead of Will himself.

“He’ll tell you everything when he’s ready,” Maddie said, as if she read Hannibal’s mind.

Perhaps one had to love Will Graham to the extent they both did in order to follow such a train of thought with instinctual accuracy. They felt bonded by this crusade to love, know and shield Will from all harm that might result from his crimes being exposed, even from awareness of Maddie’s knowledge.

“I hope so.” Hannibal looked down at his hands, politely perched on his crossed legs as he sat facing Maddie, their chairs drawn slightly back from the table.

Maddie slid the screen door behind her shut. “Oven’s cooled enough now it’s not so stifling in here. I know so, Hannibal. Will never loved anyone like he loves you; he wants to share

every bit of himself with you and that includes the past. It's just not easy for him to go back there."

Nothing could be more understandable to Hannibal than that.

"Will did tell me he was fifteen the first time he killed someone," he said.

"That's right. See, I had this boss." Her face tightened with loathing. "I was an executive assistant at a law firm before I went back to college to get my masters and go into family therapy. My boss was a rotten-souled, dirty old man and he had a thing for me from day one. I should've quit, should've told Travis, but we needed the money and I thought I could handle it myself."

"He attacked you," Hannibal concluded, matter-of-fact, sensing that was the attitude she would prefer rather than coddling.

"Uh huh. Showed up at my house one day drunk out of his mind, Travis was at work and it was my day off, Will was down at the river fishin', I couldn't see a way out. Fought him tooth and nail but he managed to get me down on the floor, I thought that was it but I'd rather die than let him…"

Hannibal covered her hand in his own. "You needn't recount this incident in too much detail."

"It's fine," she insisted, prideful in a way he could relate to. Her eyes shone with tears but her voice barely wavered as she continued her story. "Will came in and yanked that creep off of me like he was the damn incredible hulk. I tell you he was nothin' but a sprig of a thing at fifteen, one twenty-five soaking wet, didn't hit his full height and start puttin' on muscle for another couple years. But anyone would think he was a superhero when he got hold of that crazy old drunk, portly guy too, to this day I don't know how the hell Will did it. He dragged that sonuvabitch outside and punched him halfway into the ground."

"Adrenaline," Hannibal explained, "And a natural killer instinct, thrown into sudden overdrive by the urge to protect you and destroy your attacker. He might have done almost anything in those heady, fierce moments, more than just heaving dead weight of a far less intelligent and deadly opponent."

"No doubt," Maddie nodded. "I managed to stumble to the door, and I just remember looking through the screen, seeing blood paint the mud 'cause it had rained the day before and the lawn was a mess with it, and Will was pummeling my boss with both fists, over and over. I said 'that's enough, honey,' and he let up."

Hannibal could picture his beautiful boy, skinny and feral, brilliant sapphire eyes cold with hate, nearly beating the life from his mother's attacker then and there, and it made his heart feel it would explode. He had never conceived he could love Will more, yet it seemed to keep happening.

"My…*attacker,*" she grimaced, obviously refusing to speak the name attached to her trauma, "Somehow peeled himself up off the ground, maybe his own adrenaline, survivor instinct,

cockroach methodology. He never said a word, just cried like the coward he was and drove off in his fancy car."

"Will took care of me and we never told Travis. He'd have killed my boss himself, and he couldn't handle the guilt, the consequences, any of that. We had to keep him safe. We didn't tell the police about the attack, and Will said he didn't give a damn if the rat bastard went to the cops about what he done, beatin' him like that. Woulda been his word against Will's, and I would have corroborated Will's innocence too. Wasn't nothin' my boss could do but keep quiet, and he probably mighta learned his lesson about respectin' women."

"Possibly," Hannibal agreed. "But he didn't get that chance, did he? Will found him again."

"They found my boss a few nights later, alone at his house. He was in his armchair in front of the tv with a shotgun in his hand and a hole in his head, cops said it was so big you could see clear through it. That was his gun, see, and it looked like suicide. I left the firm and finally went back to school like I'd been wanting to for years, I needed a new start. Will said to me, the creep must have felt guilty over what he done to me, couldn't live with himself." Maddie shrugged, hugged herself briefly, sighed and stretched, straightening her apron. "I pretended to believe him."

"Are y'all churning butter from scratch in there?" Travis called jovially from the living room. "Picking fresh coffee beans in Peru? What all's takin' so long?"

"I don't see you in here liftin' a finger to help out," Maddie answered, laughing shakily.

She dabbed her cheeks with her apron and accepted Hannibal's offer of a hug. "You keep my boy safe, whatever you two get up to. You hear?"

"Yes. I promise, I'll always keep Will safe. I will protect your secrets, Mrs. Graham, and your son."

"Good man," Maddie smiled, drawing back from Hannibal's embrace to "shake out" her anxious state until she once again bore the appearance, and likely the mood, overall, of a cheerful Christmas hostess. "I always knew you were a good man, Hannibal."

"You humble me, Mrs. Graham," Hannibal replied, thinking of some of the insulting descriptions which his Uncle Robertus had so often flung at him, eating away at his youthful self-esteem like acid. Thinking of his parents' disinterested, faint pretenses of affection, as if children were necessary but inconvenient.

Maddie opened her mouth to reply, probably with a very kind remark, but Travis came in and said accusingly, "You want more help, I'm here. Maybe you'll finally spill the secrets to me, too."

"The secrets?" Maddie asked, raising her eyebrows. She went back to adding maraschino cherries in a ring around the top of the splendid pie and Hannibal began pouring the coffee into mugs, then fetched the cream from the refrigerator and set the sugar bowl beside it on the counter.

“Of the White Christmas Pie, duh,” Travis chuckled. “How the hell do you get cherries, pineapple, meringue and coconut to blend together like they were actually meant to coexist?”

“Oh, darlin’, you know I’m a sucker for compliments,” Maddie smirked, walking up to her husband and patting his cheek before tugging his Grinch sweater. “But I’ll take the White Christmas Pie recipe to the grave, I promised Bea McFeeley that back in --”

“*Back in ‘93 at the Prairieville Methodist Church Supper*,” Travis finished, turning to Hannibal and adding, “You know we aren’t even religious. She went to those suppers to get the damn recipes.”

“And I got them all,” Maddie grinned. “Those women might be bible thumpers but they know how to *cook.*”

“Fine, fine, fine,” Travis laughed. “Don’t tell me the details of your culinary magic. Won’t keep me from tryin’ to guess how you do it, though.”

“Guess away,” Maddie laughed, watching her husband as he got a large tub of neopolitan ice cream from the freezer. “Some secrets just have to stay that way.”

Hannibal met her steady gaze and nodded with a gentle smile. Then he went into the living room and found Will hanging their now empty stockings back on their pegs over the fireplace, next to those of his parents.

“I just like the way they look, side by side like that,” Will explained, stepping back to admire the display pridefully. “Kinda like you and me.”

“Side by side,” Hannibal smiled, wrapping an arm around Will’s shoulders as his boy leaned into him and hugged him closer. They stood in the relative quiet, only the vague chatter of his parents in the kitchen and the old-timey carols from the yule log channel on tv, only the warmth of this simple embrace as they watched the day fade slowly into evening, violet drifting over white in the sky like a fluttering curtain.

“I like that bow tie,” Will said apropos of nothing a few minutes later. “You look so distinguished and intellectual.”

“I am distinguished and intellectual,” Hannibal maintained, primly amused, massaging Will’s shoulder, finding the usual tension from his old injury and soothing it, easily as he breathed.

“Mmm,” Will nodded thoughtfully, melting into the caring mini-massage. “You are. But you won’t be very distinguished later on when I get you to myself again. And I do like that bow tie.”

“Will. Why do I get the distinct impression you have something devastatingly profane on your mind, despite the innocent sartorial topic?” Hannibal brushed his lips over Will’s forehead and breathed him in, warm amber and vanilla, the scent like sugar sprinkled over his senses.

Sugar, spice…

“I don’t know, honey. Guess you just have a dirty mind.” Will grinned and squeezed the older man’s ass on the sly, right before Maddie called them to come into the kitchen.

“Dessert’s up!” she yelled like a restaurant line worker.

“Well then,” Hannibal said, his heartbeat stuttering at the way Will gazed darkly at him through lowered lashes. He cleared his throat, then offered his arm, Victorian gentleman style, to his lover. “Shall we?”

***

Late that night, back at home, Will fucked Hannibal near to blackout, sweaty bodies sliding and thrusting together in sloppy strokes and wet sucking, licking, biting kisses. The colors of their love were smeared in a light wine drunkenness, yet they knew each other by heart, everywhere to touch that drove the other wild with pleasure, how safe it was to murmur, gasp and moan words of eternal love and devotion. Tugging hair, scratching backs, slamming hips and gripping, spanking, crying out in ecstasy that finally became unspeakable.

It started out as funny that Will wanted to make love to Hannibal while the older man wore nothing but his bow tie and a Santa hat, but playful mischief had crescendoed again into insatiable, sticky-sweet, overstimulated madness.

Will rutted into Hannibal, bottoming out again and again, the doctor pressed flat to the mattress and whimpering weakly, taking every hard, exquisite inch he was given with infinite gratitude, ever-growing need. With a feral, gruff shout, Will filled him deep inside with warm, copious seed.

“Come here,” he growled, curls dancing wildly around his flushed face, pleasure and love and the hint of tipsiness making him gorgeously sensuous.

With rough tenderness, he rolled Hannibal over so that his lover gazed up at him in a missionary position, stroking Will’s face when the younger man straddled him. Treating Hannibal to more soft, then bruising and deep kisses, he released his reddened, swollen lips only to pepper impatient but irresistible kisses down his chest and belly.

Hannibal’s head flew back as his fingers clutched at Will’s curls, hips arching up as Will took his aching cock deep in his mouth and sucked insistently, bringing his lover to another shattering climax and leaving them both somewhere beyond exhausted, shipwrecked but landing on the shore of each other’s waiting arms in the dim bedroom.

“Hannibal,” Will said, intently staring at his profile by lamplight, elegantly chiseled and yet so soft with feeling now.

He nuzzled into Hannibal’s chest and sighed as the older man’s strong arms encircled him. They were too hot and sweaty for this, but neither could they ever hold back.

“Mmm?” Hannibal asked absent-mindedly, massaging Will’s back and smelling his hair.

“I want to ask you if…” Will hesitated, bit his own kiss-swollen lip and held back yet another impetuous proposal.

I need the ring. It’s not the same if I don’t have the ring.

He had to put it on layaway and pay for it in installments over several more weeks. Obviously, if he used the credit card which Hannibal had given him, the antique jeweler's charge would ruin the surprise. There was nothing he could do but wait, because with all the things Will had egotistically half-assed in the past, this wasn’t going to be one of them. This, he had to make just right, make Hannibal’s dream of the most romantic proposal a reality.

It’s not that much longer to wait, calm down. He chided himself, confused by the way he sometimes seemed to almost panic with the necessity of the waiting. Hannibal wasn’t going anywhere, neither was he. Why were his profiler instincts buzzing with paranoia, why couldn’t he calm down about the damn proposal and the ring that would be his to give soon enough?

But this really had been the best Christmas ever, and Will wasn’t going to ruin it with unaccountable and pointless worries. He kissed Hannibal’s warm chest and murmured, “Can we go on a trip after the New Year? I’ll take some time off work, however many weeks you think is enough. I want you to show me Florence.”

Maybe it will be our honeymoon. Will wondered if Hannibal was thinking the same, couldn’t tell by his beautiful, mysterious smile. He wouldn’t mind a rush to the altar with this man, not one bit.

“That sounds utterly perfect, my love,” Hannibal replied, pressing soft kisses to Will’s forehead, then reaching over to shut the lamp off. “Merry Christmas.”

“Mmm.” Will snuggled up to him even closer, reassured by the memories of this happy day and dreams of their future. They smelled so damn good like this together, wrapped in heat, their natural scents and colognes indistinguishably blended, one more way they marked each other. “Merry Christmas, Hannibal.”

Chapter End Notes

Btw I also did not plan on the Christmas chapters falling on #'s 24-25 but now that I realize it, I'm cackling 😂🎄

Updated Note, 7/17/21
I hate not being able to do at least one update a week, but the past couple of weeks have made it unusually difficult for me to have time for write. I am still working hard on the next part and think it will be really interesting to explore, so expect more soon! My kids have camp this week so I'll have more quiet time and I'm itching to write!!

After the gold rush

Chapter Notes

Hi! Just in case it happens again, I wanted to let all of you lovely readers know: any delays on the next chapters won't mean I'm abandoning the fic. It's actually just that I kept getting interrupted by life stuff each time I sat down to write lately. But! I am super excited for the rest of the story as it's all planned out now. 🖤

About this next story arc
This arc we're entering into will most likely cover three chapters. Not gonna lie, if you love you some Hannibal Lecter whump and hurt/comfort, plus wrathful, vengeance-driven Will Graham, you will likely enjoy this -- if you don't like that darker peril, this part may not be your cup of tea. However, everything that is happening leads into further developments that for me feel fulfilling and exciting. Eager to see what you think!

One thing that ended up surprising me -- writing the darker scenario from Hannibal's POV, a good amount of dry humor came in 😂. I love a sassy cannibal!

cw:
Hannibal is going to get a sizable wallop of hurt, the comfort obviously to come (I'm not a hurt-no-comfort girl). Spoilery cw, use or avoid as you choose: imprisonment, medical torture (not graphic), non-consensual drug use, references to starvation. Brief reference to an eating disorder.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Part Four: Anyone would die to feel your touch

Hannibal lived under the constant strain of a fear he tried and failed daily to repress, the fear of his own happiness.

In the days that followed Christmas, he and Will lazed about “playing” with their recent gifts to one another, many of them erotic in nature, some of them more serene, such as the books they read to each other, the records Will played for them to slow dance to while he sang along under his breath, sending chills of pained joy down his lover’s spine. The music Hannibal had composed for Will as part of his gifts, playing it on harpsichord while the younger man stared at him, blushing as tears glazed his eyes. Sweaters for the dogs, which Zoe loved and Buster immediately tried to paw or bite off, much to their owners’ amusement. Will and Hannibal, drinking wine and sharing extravagant feasts, feeding each other and ending with an impatient seduction more times than not.

What could have been more idyllic, if only every moment did not seem to Hannibal as if it were stolen from the hands of time?

If only he did not regard his joy with Will, even on the eve of his own planned proposal, as impossible to last forever after. He might as well be clutching at grains of sand before the tide swept them far away, but he was willing to crawl down that beach forever, even if he never obtained the certainty his pounding heart and racing nerves constantly demanded.

Hannibal needed Will like a needle of life-saving drugs poised above his desperate veins, needed him far more than food, sleep or breath, much less dignity and foolish pride. But he had loved before, and lost in such a brutally harsh manner that it scarred him into believing all precious affection was finite -- God was a far more cruel beast than the Devil could ever aspire to be, and Hannibal could not dispel his paranoia. What if Mischa's fate had been a mere prelude to the misery defining his own life, what if it were someday bookended by the loss of Will? He could not bear the thought, intruding on the edges of his consciousness in the most blissful interludes, when Will climbed on top of him in bed and held him down and said *"I love you, I want you,"* over and over, bruising his lips and neck in kisses, driving his hand down between them in broad, firm strokes to make Hannibal fall apart in helpless surrender, pleasure cracking him wide open to bleed all over his hopes and fears --

It hit him then, in a shocking blood rush to the head, the pain of happiness. He could not believe fully, no matter what he tried.

Hannibal metabolized these lingering problems as best he could, regarding them as a fully worthwhile, potentially lifelong, companion to his highest heights of joy. If this fear was what he must accept in order to be with Will, it seemed a small enough price to pay, no matter how excruciating his repressed anxieties.

On December 30, Hannibal finally cooked dinner for Will wearing only his apron, one that happened to bear the slogan, *All this, and I can cook!* yet another holiday gift from his beloved.

He carefully chose a relatively simple (very well: by his standards, almost insultingly simple) linguini with red clam sauce, but still -- knowing Will's eyes were on him, his ass fully exposed by the back of the apron, his sex automatically alert at the very idea of this dirty, lovely little game, Hannibal could barely summon oxygen, much less cooking genius, normally his foremost talent (in a complicated respect).

And he knew, of course he knew what this would be. What about this could be mysterious? Not the playful laugh as Will tied his apron in a tight, neat knot and did the same to his heart-strings, not the glistening promise of sinful lust in cobalt eyes, the flick of Will's pretty pink tongue over luscious lips, the spiralling curls clustered about an increasingly sweaty brow as the younger man watched him work in the kitchen.

Hannibal knew what this was, yet lacked the basic dignity to do that which had been ingrained in him as a basic necessity of walking upon the earth since he was placed on it: hide his feelings, for lack of a more elegant phrasing, since his blood was currently coursing elsewhere: being cool.

Will stole his ability to *be cool*, fired him up until he found a freedom within emotional chaos, wasn't that always the shocking appeal of his bond, freshly astounding every single time they connected like a fist to flesh, a knife digging into an open wound, decadent pleasure-pain drowning them and saving them all at once -- ?

Even now, in a scenario (much like Will's bunny lingerie) which might be rendered comical by its playfulness, Hannibal's hands were trembling as he sliced tomatoes and tried not to accidentally sever a finger, his heart was heaving and pumping fast and bold as a freight train. He felt Will's owning, seductive gaze raking over him and gulped, glancing up from his work to see Will sitting in the armchair across from the kitchen island, slowly sipping a glass of red wine.

Will looked elegantly puckish, wearing a simple but devastatingly flattering white button-down shirt, clinging to his gorgeous physique -- showing off his slim build and that subtle round curve of his low belly, such a soft lovely spot (Hannibal often thought he'd be happy to live with his cheek planted to that place forever while Will slowly carded a hand through his hair) -- and slate grey trousers. The shirt sleeves were rolled up to reveal the flawless flow of Will's strong forearms into beautiful hands, his long fingers languorous, stroking the side of his wine glass, his face incomparably stunning, fixing Hannibal with a devilish, bright-eyed smile.

"I'm...having trouble concentrating," Hannibal admitted.

Will took another sip of wine and set the glass down on the low wooden table by his chair. His eyes flitted briefly to the window behind Hannibal, which had recently been replaced after his lover threw a vase through it during a fit of jealous rage. He looked thoughtfully at the older man.

"Do you feel like you're performing?" Will asked lightly.

"With you?" Hannibal put the knife down on the cutting board and glanced down at the sloppy mess he had made of the none-the-less vibrant, juicy tomatoes which would still taste just as good. He smiled softly. "Never."

"I want...to know what you're thinking," Hannibal elaborated, his steady cinnamon gaze on Will again. His voice had quavered gently over the admission.

Will stood and crossed the room, looking again rather serious given the mischievous tryst they had concocted. He wrapped his arms around Hannibal from behind and laid his face on the doctor's broad back, fingers spread over the apron, palms pressed to the doctor's hard nipples, noticeable under the thin fabric.

His voice rocked Hannibal like a tiny boat lost in immense dark waves. "I'm thinking that you're beautiful," Will murmured, and Hannibal moaned as the younger man embraced him tighter.

Will's cock was hard in his pants, pressed to Hannibal's bare ass. He slipped a hand under the apron and wrapped it around the doctor's equally engorged member, sighing in approval.

“I know you can’t wait. You’re impatient again, honey. I keep telling myself…” Will stroked expertly, rubbing his dick against Hannibal’s soft cheeks with the same tempo, and he absorbed Hannibal’s moans like the air he needed to go on living. “Keep thinking I’ll make you wait and wait, because you’re so fucking gorgeous the more desperate you get…”

Will dropped his trousers and slicked his cock with the olive oil sat out on the counter, and Hannibal’s breath caught as his own erection bobbed heavily between his thighs, aching for the loss of Will’s hand, but his own wouldn’t do, not by comparison, and not if he could have Will in control of his pleasure.

“But you’re too beautiful and *I’m* the one who can’t wait to have you,” Will admitted, voice gone rough with passionate arousal. He guided himself into Hannibal’s well-prepared hole and they groaned in mutual delight while his slick, rigid cock pushed in easily to the hilt.

Will slid his hand under the apron again, this time tugging at little tufts of Hannibal’s chest hair, then rubbing lubricated fingers over sensitive nipples. His hips were flush to Hannibal’s ass, his other hand deep in Hannibal’s hair atop his head, gripping possessively. Soon his voice fell into Hannibal’s ear as the doctor stood almost stock still in the hold of immeasurable pleasure.

“Are you mine, daddy?” Will’s voice had gone even rougher, almost a hiss, certainly a demand.

“Yes,” Hannibal got out tightly, keening at the bliss of Will beginning to slowly but firmly fuck him, playing with his nipples and pulling his hair so hard it hurt, “*Yes!*” when Will’s hips slammed harder and faster, “*Yes-Yes-Yes!*” as Will poured his body tight over him from behind, Hannibal’s sweaty palms seeking purchase on the countertop where he was roughly bent over. He couldn’t get a grip on anything, so his hands slid and slammed wherever they happened to land with every eager, harsh thrust of Will inside him, targeting his prostate to perfection. The cutting board, knife and tomatoes flew to the floor and made a mess; Hannibal’s moans grew louder and more shameless as Will grabbed his hip and fucked even harder and deeper.

Will leaned over him and muttered darkly in his ear, “You’re mine, Hannibal, and I’m going to keep you.” He rolled his hips, making Hannibal feel every inch of his long, beautiful cock buried as far as it could go inside him, pressing right to the swollen bud of pleasure that made the doctor shake and whimper, “*Will*...”

“I’ll never let you go,” Will proclaimed, licking Hannibal’s neck, then biting fiercely, drawing blood as the older man wept with pained joy, immersed in worship, and Will’s words had begun to sound like threats -- he began fucking again in earnest, shoving Hannibal’s torso flat to the counter top with a palm planted on the middle of his back, spanking his lover’s ass hard while he rutted to his heart’s content and got them both breathtakingly close.

“Never,” Will promised, sending Hannibal over the edge with that particular thrust, all the warm, aching pressure at the older man’s core culminating in a white-out blur of pleasure, his cum spurting all over the floor.

Will came with a feral series of grunts, riding out his orgasm and pushing Hannibal into oversensitive euphoria, his teardrops painting the splotches of tomato juice on the counter, his knees weak, Will his only gravity. Thankfully, Will held on tight, digging his fingers into Hannibal's hips to leave purple prints on his skin, his seed spilling deep inside the doctor, his spasming hips slapping Hannibal's ass over and over until he was satisfied he had drawn out every possible gasp of pleasure from them both --

For now.

"Do you understand?" Will was crying, too, just a little. He stayed inside Hannibal as long as he could, hugging him as they both breathed heavily, hearts racing, the two of them splayed over the counter, hot and sweaty. Biting Hannibal's shoulder, he whispered, "You couldn't get away from me even if you wanted to, I'd never let you."

Those words brought a comfort that perhaps even Will might not understand, and Hannibal wept freely, so much that Will became concerned. He gently withdrew his softening cock from his lover and tossed his boxers back on, distracted by Hannibal's reaction. Carefully, tenderly he guided Hannibal up from the counter, turned him face to face and gathered him in a soothing hug.

"Shhh, it's okay, it's okay," he vowed, massaging Hannibal's back, loosening the apron strings and kissing his flushed, tear-stained face. "Honey? Did I upset you?"

"No," Hannibal shook his head, vehement, clinging to Will. "You were perfect. I love you, love you...you bring me such happiness."

Will smiled in relief, kissed his forehead. "Love you too, Daddy, always."

Always. Hannibal was so nervously excited about his plans to propose the following evening, but he knew he would be accepted, knew this was only the beginning of their wonderful story together, there was no more independence, no damning solitude to fear -- even if a part of him always would fear its return, perhaps that was just fine. He was only human, much to his surprise, after all.

Will ordered pizza; they laughed and cleaned up the mess from the floor, showered together and put on the pajamas they had given each other for Christmas. It was another night together, shimmering and precious, each one new and sweet, never feeling bored, never too much, never enough. As always, they slept coiled tightly in near vice grip embrace, Hannibal curled up behind Will and the younger man clinging to his hand.

In the middle of the night, Will woke from a dreamless sleep with a start, realizing he had been snoring, and loudly. He glanced at the clock on the nightstand, which told him a blurry, neon green "2:07." Hannibal stirred slightly, kissed his neck and told him to go back to sleep.

"I'm sorry, I think I was snoring," Will mumbled, a bit mortified. "I hope I didn't make you stay awake with the noise."

Hannibal began to chuckle and went on for so long, sleepily amused, that Will furrowed his brow, puzzled. "What?"

“It’s only that...you always snore,” Hannibal informed him, tenderly rubbing his belly and kissing his flaming cheek. Contentedly, he would have gone back to sleep right then.

“I *do?*” Will groaned in groggy embarrassment. “Really? Why have you never said anything? It must wake you up, drive you nuts…how annoying.”

“No. How adorable.” Hannibal kissed his ear, traced the elven shape, eyes half-lidded in the shadowy room.

For once, Winston had remained asleep on his own cushion in the study; he must have fallen into a deeper sleep than usual. It was just the two of them. Will’s frown melted into a reluctant smile at Hannibal’s words. He put his hand over Hannibal’s big one where it remained planted lovingly to his belly, wriggled his butt back into its proper position as little spoon, and when Hannibal told him again to go back to sleep, this time he obeyed very easily.

***

Will woke in the morning to the sound of Winston barking, and he sat up to glance at the door of the bedroom, where his dog stood raising an unmistakable alarm.

“Hey, what is it, boy?” Will noticed Hannibal’s side of the bed was empty and assumed he was in the bathroom or downstairs starting breakfast; it was 8:15.

He padded over to the dog, yawning as he crouched by Winston in his pjs and bare feet. “What’s the matter, Winston?” He patted the dog’s head, but Winston’s nervous stance remained obvious.

“Hannibal?” Will called, checking the bathroom to find it empty, then walking, still calm, to the kitchen to find it the same. His heart picked up speed as a canvassing of the whole house showed no Hannibal, and his call to his boyfriend’s cell phone went right to voicemail.

The Bentley was gone from the driveway, but Hannibal didn’t have work on that day, it was New Year’s Eve. He never ran errands without waking Will to tell him or leaving a note, and *never* missed his lover’s phone calls. This was so unlike him that it made Will start to panic, wondering all the while, was he overreacting?

But after he spent the better part of the day and all night searching Baltimore for Hannibal and calling him over and over, sending anxious texts, getting no response and never finding a trace of his lover, Will was over the brink into full-on terror. Had Hannibal up and *left* him? Abandoned Will, the way he ran from their motel room in Minnesota? Even then, he’d left a note…

The following morning, fueled by caffeine and panic rather than rest, as he had taken none, Will drove to Quantico with his heart in his throat, having called Jack with an urgent request to meet. He’d already notified the cops of Hannibal’s disappearance, of course, but he wanted FBI resources on this too. There was a chance Hannibal had been taken, was in genuine danger. That filled him with molten rage which ensured the perpetrator -- if they existed -- would die a hideously painful death. He stared daggers down the road and barely avoided

slipping on the ice with the tires of his same old Volvo station wagon, the one he hardly used anymore.

There was a chance Hannibal had left of his own volition, fleeing a relationship he'd lied about being happy in, freeing himself from the smothering reign of Will's affection, after the things Will had said last night maybe it made sense -- maybe Hannibal hadn't been crying with joy but with the pained decision to take off in the morning, regain his independence. Their love was all-consuming to an extent which Will knew very well scared Hannibal. Had he scared him off by getting too intense?

Will wanted to *know,* now, so he could know where to put his violence of rage, fear and vengeance, but the only place to direct himself was the investigation. Because whether Hannibal had been taken or left him, Will was going to get him back. He would use every damn resource at his disposal to find Hannibal and drag him back if necessary, kill anyone in the way, rip anything that blocked him to shreds.

***

Hannibal woke in a blur of indistinct recollections, missing puzzle pieces of reality. Somewhere under a heavy haze of what he recognized as intense sedation, psychoactive narcotic employed, there lay his impeccably quick killer instincts toward self-preservation, which never truly slept.

He acknowledged silently to himself, acclimating to the dull, plodding thud of immense pain in his temples and the freezing cold feeling all over his body, pins and needles like icicles making him sweat and tremble, that he was currently too drugged for any movement more complex than random, useless swipes of his hands back and forth. That he was lying in a dark, damp, chilly, unfamiliar room strapped tightly to a mercilessly uncomfortable, flat, hard cot. That he did not know where or why he was -- in this --

A sharp indentation throb in his wrist indicated an IV had been thrust in expertly, but unceremoniously, to make it hurt more than it needed to. Further, he had to accept that he could barely comprehend reality, that nearly everything was gone after laughing softly in the dark with Will about his snoring and going back to sleep, everything of his memory except for insubstantial, fleeting snatches of swiftly ruthless abduction.

In his mind's eye, opening and closing in exhaustion, he recalled that he must have gone downstairs at some point after talking to Will but before morning, most likely for a glass of water. While at the refrigerator, he had heard a soft scuffling noise behind him and immediately moved to confront an unseen intruder, but a second assailant had closed in on him just as quickly, pressing a cloth to his nose and mouth. The rough fabric was pungent with the sickly sweet scent of chloroform. He thought he had guessed the dogs must have been drugged as well, since they raised no alarm, but that was it. The curtain closed on his memory until this, now, awakening alone in the dark, strapped to a stiff cot, compromised in every way.

The trousers on his body felt unfamiliar, scratchy and cheap, like half a set of faded scrubs. His feet were bare, every toe sluggishly trying to wriggle against the cold, but he tired out; hands and feet went slack once again.

He had no time to acknowledge the inconvenient sensation of fear attempting to fight the drugs; he had no use for fear, and adrenaline would not be enough to cut through the thick dose of medications. Too worried about Will worrying about him, too insistent on getting out of there and back to Will post haste, even vengeance for his unknown captor was a mere afterthought. He did spend some minutes, slowly, confusedly trying to think of potential suspects. His kidnappers would appear to be hired experts, most likely not the actual culprit of the scheme.

Difficult to compose an enemy's list when a) nearly everyone he had considered an enemy, he had killed and eaten already, and b) anyone else who expressed or inspired dislike in him was clearly too unintelligent and weak to have accomplished this complicated gambit.

"I know you're awake," a shrill voice piped up in the shadows of the place he was…

Distantly he heard dripping as of pipes and developed the theory of a residential basement, based as well on the vague scent of laundry detergent and the chilly temperature, unaffected by any upstairs heating.

Someone clicked on a string and ignited a bare light bulb on the ceiling which made Hannibal blink furiously, disoriented by the sudden illumination. He tried to see himself, his situation and restraints so as to end this -- if only he knew what he faced, surely he could concoct a solution as he always did, whether through brute force, element of surprise, his own incomparable brilliance, most likely a combination of all three.

Except that his intelligence had been dimmed by medicinal onslaught and his physicality was just as dulled, much to his bitter and rising fury.

He found that as he had surmised, he did appear to be lying on a cheap, thin cot wearing a set of cheap, thin scrub pants, strapped down tight and victimized by whatever flowed from the iv by his side into his body. The basement was generic, washed-out grey, nothing he could see from his restricted vantage point aside from the chalky old walls, and now his captor.

Dramatically choosing to make an entrance, his captor stepped from the shadows and revealed herself, a petite, pale, smirking young woman with a shining, blunt-cut brunette bob and bangs, dressed unmistakably in "graduate school chic" fashion -- that smear of mucus green velvet and vomit tan corduroy, the pretension oozing from this girl's every pore, it was all *familiar,* and associated with the jagged edged blade of jealousy.

Hannibal began to fight his restraints in greater earnest, his willingness for slow calculation electrified into anger at the sight of his captor, smirking at him, assuming a complete victory he yearned to snatch from her understanding, just before he snapped her neck.

"That's pointless," the girl sneered, curling her cupid's bow lips, painted with a red gloss that looked unpleasantly wet, too much, like a spill of blood from a vampire's mouth.

She sat down in a chair next to Hannibal's cot and observed him with clinical steeliness that somehow did not interfere with her continued amusement at his ordeal. "You can't break free, Dr. Lecter. I'm going to keep you exactly awake enough to think and talk, no more. You'll be

far too sluggish, especially the longer you're here, if you choose not to cooperate." She tipped her head to one side, the obnoxious bob haircut bouncing.

Pressing one small, pale finger in french manicure to the side of her heart-shaped face, the girl pondered, "To be honest, I'm not entirely sure which I'd prefer: your obedience and subsequent release, or the opportunity to torture you, as I have suffered on your account, quite possibly to a long-in-coming and especially wretched demise."

She had too much perfume on, the way she had too much lip color and too much ego gleaming through her clear and requited hatred and malice towards him. In fact, she reeked of Whispers in the Library by Maison Margiela to the extent he far preferred the dank moldy aroma of the old basement to the abundance of stomach-turning pepper, vanilla and cedar.

"I remember you now," said Hannibal calmly. He saw her as no formidable adversary now that he did. Certainly, he was at a disadvantage. The inability to summon motion more emphatic than finger and toe flutters, plus jerky but exhausting swipes of his wrists over the hard cot was surely unfortunate.

But he did not fear pain or the cold, much to his captor's future disappointment. Here he lay on a back pain-inducing near-morgue slab of a bed, shirtless and barefoot in a chilly, dim and disgusting basement, most likely featuring a guest starring slate of repulsive insects as the audience to this little play of intended destruction and triumph. Hannibal had experienced more of the cold and of pain than this spoiled, quite insane and definitively short-sighted young woman could ever comprehend, and that had been by the age of eight, when Mischa…

This foolish young thing had no idea who she was up against.

"You are one of Will's students," Hannibal got out, tongue heavy, eyes fighting the temptations of sleep which his body urged because he'd been trying too hard. His voice was slurred, and the girl reached over to adjust the dosage on his IV drip.

"That shouldn't be enough of a decrease to give you physical strength, but I need to be able to understand you." She sat back in her chair, hands folded on her fashionably ugly pants-clad knees. Tiny, Hannibal considered. She was very petite, bone-thin and five one, hungry looking. Most likely bulimic. He understood that craving for complete control - one of two traits they had in common. And the other…

"You're in love with Will." Hannibal spoke a bit more clearly when he resumed in a few minutes; the clouds over his mind had mildly parted.

Immediately he and the girl had fallen into a pattern of battle: who could remain coolest, calmest, most superior in their unflappable insistence on being the smartest one in the room? Dr. Hannibal Lecter, genius psychiatrist and the Chesapeake Ripper, or this...practically a *child,* who had to hire grunts to kidnap her prey? He laughed hoarsely.

"My being in love with Professor Graham is not *funny,*" the girl insisted, toddler-stubborn, her tiny nose crinkling.

She must be about twenty-five, and would have made a fine FBI agent with her powerful drive for whatever she pursued. A shame she would certainly be dead, the moment Hannibal could escape his restraints.

“No.” Hannibal huffed a sigh, serene as in his office across from an especially idiotic patient, condescending in those cases, here simply snide. He smiled, and although his voice was still wan and he was, well, where he was and how -- he could see he was already irritating his enemy with his confident mockery of her affections. “Hilarious is a far more accurate term, Miss...”

“Carmichael,” she snapped, fingers on her lap digging into the backs of her hands. “Cami Carmichael. And you’re wrong. Of course, you’d love to believe Will could never fall for someone else, but he and I, we’re meant to be together. *Made* for each other. You’re just a temporary distraction, and you’re in the way.”

“So, why go to all this trouble?” Hannibal arched his light brows. The straps under his chest, across his waist, thighs and ankles, were cutting into him, they were secured so tightly. He could just about breathe, but that did not stop him from perceiving his iron-clad superiority to a school girl novice villain.

“Why not confess your love for the professor after class one day?” he suggested. “Would Will not immediately abandon me, the forgettable accessory that I am, just one more bad relationship on his path to true love with you?”

Hannibal could not help chortling again at the mere thought.

“Shut up,” Cami snarled, “You’re just trying to get me worked up and throw me off my game. It won’t work. Will is loyal. He needs you to be definitively gone in some irretrievable way, so that he can find me waiting there to comfort him, see that I’m the one he needs.”

She leaned forwards slightly and toyed with the tubing dangling from the IV stand. “My mom was a doctor, a surgeon, like you. I used to watch her work and I heard my share of hospital horror stories as a kid, eating vending machine snacks in the waiting rooms, waiting for her to take me home.”

“Oh.” Hannibal only wished his hand was free that he might lay it sarcastically upon his heart. “What an adorably endearing fragment of your doubtless charming origin story.”

“If you *fuck* with me, Dr. Lecter, I will give you an air embolism. You don’t want to make me lose my temper. Get it?” She fluttered her long, dark lashes that seemed too big for her face, her eyes so far inside them somehow, grey-green and flat with loathing.

“I’m far more interested in hearing your long term scheme, and your proposed options for me,” Hannibal replied breezily, tea-party-cordial.

She rolled her eyes and stood, began circling his cot, shoe heels scuffing the floor with restless scrapes every few steps. He pictured boots as ugly as the rest of her outfit and took another brief infusion of satisfaction from her dreadful style sense.

“Option one. You can leave Will of your own volition.” Cami continued stalking around the room, the quintessential villain cliche, monologuing as if the cinematic ridiculousness of her behavior were not thoroughly banal. “Then I’ll let you live. You go to him, break it off cruelly, *completely,* and move away afterwards. Make a new life somewhere new. Leave him in the dust and block him on every way he might have to contact you.”

“How completely intriguing.” Hannibal mused, “What is to prevent me from lying to you that I will do this, then immediately doing the opposite the moment I am free again?”

“The poison currently sleeping in your blood,” Cami explained, grinning at him when he finally looked surprised. “Didn’t see that coming, huh, from your lofty heights? The toxin with which I’ve injected you will kill you in a week, down to the hour, down to the second, if you don’t get the antidote. I happen to have a considerable fortune at my disposal. Rich old grandpa died and left me everything, I was his favorite.”

“No accounting for taste.”

“It’s a designer poison, no other like it in the world, no other cure but the antidote, of which I have exactly one vial hidden where I’ll never tell you. *That* is what will keep you from lying to me.”

“A compelling enough motivation. However, I confess I would far rather die than do as you suggest to Will. I will not break him simply to pave the way for your doomed attempt to take my place. I would never hurt Will, you see. Perhaps that’s something you could never understand.”

“Everything I’m doing is for Will,” Cami said sharply.

“Yet, Will wants me. He loves me. You would take me from him, when it isn’t what he desires at all. That does not seem like devotion.” Hannibal frowned, reminded of how he himself used to behave before he fell in love, learned his own capacity for surrender. “It’s just selfish.”

“Option Two,” Cami went on, annoyed, rounding the corner at the end of his cot with the next turn in her monologuing circle. She paused, planted her small hands to the cold spot on the sheet-barren cot between Hannibal’s spread and bound feet. “You stay here until you’re dead. Afterwards, I’ll destroy your body, not a trace to be found. I’m curious if the starvation or poison gets you first, but it should be a fun experiment to watch and find out.”

She straightened her posture, crossed her arms and shrugged, all mock turtleneck ego. He knew the earrings under her bob were tacky oversized real pearls, he just *knew* it.

“Few endeavors in life quite so lively and fascinating as a good and controlled experiment,” Hannibal allowed casually.

“I’ll make Will believe you abandoned him. I won’t have him knowing you died, so he can mourn you and put you on a damn pedestal for the rest of his life. He’s so sweet, so loyal…”

So deadly. If Cami only knew what Will would do to her, if he ever learned she had laid a single finger on Hannibal…

"Notes are easy to forge, and I'm sure you could manufacture such a scenario. Whether Will would believe it remains to be seen."

"He'll believe it. And I'll be right there when he needs love, care and comfort after having his heart shattered by the one he trusted the most, you, and then -- It will be *me*, in his arms, his bed, sharing his laughter, soothing his tears, forever." Cami's expression went from angry to dreamy.

"And you'll never see Will again," she added.

Hannibal's blood went cold and tears sprang instantly into his eyes; painfully, he gulped back the embarrassing need to cry. Out of everything, the kidnapping, imprisonment, threats and discomfort, nothing had frightened him about this situation until she spoke those words. He had to remind himself she had no chance of success against him.

Smugly, he retorted, "So you say. Yet my choice of Option Two remains intact. Do you intend to remain at my side monitoring my gradual withering and demise?"

"You're already *withered,* you pathetic creep," Cami countered. "What are you, fifty? You're too old for Will. So pompous. I don't understand how you ever got him under your spell, but I'm going to save him. Will is extraordinary and shouldn't be wasted on an old bore like you. He needs a real partner to invigorate him, give him purpose. Inspiration."

"Does he?" Hannibal smiled, "Will has often mentioned my being 'too old for him' as one of my most attractive features, incidentally."

Cami scowled, but did not give him an air embolism quite yet.

He doubted whether she had the fiber of patience to wait a week for him to die, especially if he summoned every ounce of his most obnoxious running commentary. If she got close enough and he could revive sufficient strength -- Cami would not be a difficult opponent to fight, even if he was weakened. She was brittle enough to snap like a twig if he could slip free and reach her in the right places…

If he could infuriate her enough at the precise moment he could combine a flash of stolen strength with restored range of motion...it would be over quickly.

"You're sassy now," Cami resumed coldly, "So full of *quips,* ever the arrogant socialite. We'll see how smart and quippy you are once you start getting really hungry."

"Hmm. You see me as an established and respected doctor and a prominent figure on the Baltimore cultural arts scene, a renowned and creative chef with a flair for the dramatic in presentation…" Languidly, he ticked off a few of his more well-known public qualities, drumming his fingers in slow fluttering alternations of pressure on the cot, causing a low, metallic clunking sound.

“Yeah. So what? I’ve done my research on you. It only confirmed what a terrible match you are for someone as beautiful and remarkable as Professor Graham.”

“So, there are many, many things you would not have turned up even in your most scrupulous research,” Hannibal explained. “I’m a man with secrets, Miss Carmichael. One of which...I am well-acquainted with hunger. And it does not frighten me in the least.”

Chapter End Notes

Don't worry, we're still going to have a big, gorgeous proposal scene, just a bit later on in the story!

Next time: (sneak preview hints only if you want them!)
Will uses all the resources at his disposal -- including Team Sassy Science -- to investigate Hannibal's disappearance, still torn between fearing his lover left him and suspecting his abduction.

Meanwhile, Hannibal schemes to escape Cami's clutches,

And Alana reaches a turning point in her profile on the Vigilante killer...

Crushed like paper, washed like rain

Chapter Notes

Oh my God, I'm back again! 🎼 Yup that was a Backstreet Boys reference 😄

My kids are back in school, my quiet writing time is back, I live! (Mushu.gif)

So. I'm going to try and post the remaining chapters of "Gold Rush" weekly on Thursdays. I plan to get on a regular schedule with all fic updates, including the many Hannigram ideas I had to hold back all summer during the chaotic months! Can't wait to share them soon.

cw for this chapter: some mentions of difficulty eating due to stress; and a supporting character death that's pretty grisly (ignore me cackling).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Should've learned from the movies that good guys don't run away" -Kacey Musgraves, "Space Cowboy"

"What if…" Will sighed into the cup of black coffee he was nursing at his parents' kitchen table, watching his breath making tiny ripples in bitter dark liquid.

The invigorating scent of pure caffeine was the only thing keeping him awake at the moment, other than the continued stag-hoof plod of dread in his heart and his unkillable determination to get Hannibal back.

He took a sip, momentarily stabilized by the quick fix, before his next words sent him right back to hell again. This, he hadn't said out loud yet, although Hannibal had been missing for three days while Will scoured the earth searching for him, mining details on every potential enemy, visiting each murder rolodex business card in person to no avail. These words, he had made himself swallow back, dying anyway from the venom they sent coursing through his soul.

"What if he *left* me?" Will blurted, and across the table from him, Maddie blanched, reaching for his hand and squeezing it.

"Will, honey, when was the last time you slept? Or ate somethin'?"

Worried sick herself, both for Hannibal and her son, Maddie was dressed down in blush pink sweats, her hair absent-mindedly scraped into a bun on the back of her head, and she was fidgeting with the plate of toast and eggs she had several times pushed towards Will, only to have it shoved aside before he again lowered his eyes into the balls of his fists with a world-weary groan, soft and broken.

“Doesn’t matter,” Will mumbled, “Not if he’s gone. Listen, Mom, I’ll be fine.”

He sat back in his chair and laid a hand on his dually starving and nauseated stomach, empty except for whatever random bits and pieces of food he’d managed to shove down in chaotic intervals over the past 72 hours of misery.

It was hardest of all to blot the tensed, smoldering rage off the surface of his disposition before his mother noticed he was torn between impulses that would terrify her if she understood how…

What if Hannibal really had *left* him? Allowed Will to drive himself crazy searching for him worried literally sick, and all to make a swift, seamless exit from all the possessive, autonomy-stealing energy of their relationship? To shake Will off and start over again somewhere else, whole and slickly gleaming, encased in his flawless person suit once more…

Will squeezed his eyes shut, scolded himself with a quick, hard shake of his head, gripped the table and swallowed hard, exhaling through his nostrils. He knew he must look pretty unstable to Maddie, but if he let these feelings fully show, it would be so much worse. The repression cost him copious extra energy he didn’t have in reserve. He was overextended and that was increasingly dangerous, teetering over desperation into the wild blue disaster he became off his own leash.

If Hannibal left him like that, Will was going to find out, and he was going to hunt his lover down like a runaway animal in need of discipline, he was going to drag Hannibal back home by any means necessary and keep him tied up for days if need be until he learned his lesson that there was no leaving, there was no life except the two of them,

And that was if the seams of love woven into his skin and veins didn’t burst under all the pressure of rage and betrayal. Then, Will was genuinely afraid of what he might do to Hannibal.

Hannibal, who he missed, who he loved, who he was dying to see and touch more and more by the second...his jaw had locked; he relaxed his posture with more taxing effort and puffed out another restless exhale.

“Will?” Maddie had watched in calmly quiet consideration of his space and sadness, but the corners of her mouth were etched in deepening worry. “You gotta eat, honey. You have to sleep, or--”

“Mom, I *can’t,* I can’t. Look...I came here because I needed about an hour to wallow before I get back to work,” he elaborated. “I knew you wouldn’t mind.”

“I don’t, course I don’t, darlin’.” Maddie sipped her own coffee while doubtless musing on how to comfort Will, respect his boundaries, and save him from his own looming self-destruction at the same time. “You can always come here for help, whatever it is you need. If your Dad wasn’t away on that job in Culpepper he’d be right here tellin’ you the same. He’ll be back by tonight--”

“I’m leaving as soon as I finish this cup of coffee. Dad doesn’t have to rush back on my account,” Will said dismissively, sullen and wan.

“Will Graham. Your Dad isn’t gonna stay outta town workin’ a job at a time like this. Course he’s comin’ back home, to *be* here, whenever you might need his help, whether you do or not.”

“Sorry. I know, I know.” Will pressed two fingers right to the vein in the center of his brow that vibrated with the sharpest discomfort. There was a whole orchestra of pain playing nonstop through his head, between the patchy eating and horrible anxiety. “I appreciate you both. But Mom...what if Hannibal’s gone because he wanted to be gone?”

“Honestly, I don’t think that’s possible.” Maddie began piling the scrambled eggs on top of the buttered toast, making a sandwich the way Will used to like it when he was a kid. Thoughtfully, she added, “Remember that time when you were in junior high, and Dad and I almost split?”

“Sure,” Will shrugged, easily dredging up the memory despite feeling like little more than a pile of rumpled flannel and despair at present. “You were working nights, he was working days, y’all hardly saw each other except to butt heads.”

“We lost our connection,” Maddie clarified. “See, right then, sacrificing our quality time as a couple to try and make ends meet, we lost our priorities, started forgetting why we were in love, then of course, other people came along and started flirting with us both when we were apart, vulnerable and confused. That’s what always happens. But still…”

“You worked it out.”

“You’re damn right we did, son. Because we had a foundation that nothing external was gonna crack, and because of who your Dad is, at his core. What do I always say about a good man, Will?”

Will stopped alternating sips of coffee with pressing his hands to his throbbing forehead for long enough to gain a split second’s worth of crystallizing realization. “‘Good men don’t leave.’”

He stood up suddenly, and to his mother it seemed like about ten years of stress and heartbreak fell off his face like a second skin, leaving behind her lovestruck, devoted, faith-driven son. Faith in Hannibal finally restored what his own insecurities had almost stolen from his understanding.

“Hannibal is a good man,” Will said emphatically, pointing at Maddie, although they both knew he was downright scolding himself. “He’d never leave me. *Never.*”

“Bingo. So you eat somethin’, you get a few hours sleep, and you do all you can to find your man, because ain’t no one better at it, and ain’t nothin’ gonna stand in your way, I know that.”

Will was already miles away in his thoughts, investigative files rearranging themselves with greater organization and precision in his mind palace's office.

Theories grew, branched into sub-details, drove him wild with possibilities and courses of action he should take. "Thanks, Mom, I'll be in touch," he muttered.

She caught the unbuttoned sleeve of his flannel, hanging off his arm. "Will, please eat. Please get some sleep. There are circles under your eyes, honey, that are almost *red*."

Will had fleetingly noted the angry red-purple ditches of sleepless crying under his bloodshot eyes in the mirror the last time he splashed cold water on his perpetually hot face.

"I don't want you to worry for me, but I just can't stop, not till I find him. I can barely force myself to swallow food a couple times a day." He glanced down at the neat little bundled eggs on toast. "Sorry. I can't even stand the thought of chewing right now, and...I can't lie down, I wouldn't be able to hold still."

"Okay, Will." Maddie squeezed his hand again, but she knew when to let go. "Just please do your best to take care of yourself. You won't be able to find him and save him if you're compromised by hunger and exhaustion."

Will nodded. "Mom, I'm so ashamed that I thought he left me, I had myself almost convinced…" his chin wobbled, face turning red. "I can't cry now, can't. I won't be able to stop."

Maddie hugged him, held him together. He couldn't give into the tears, but he briefly hugged her back and breathed in the soothing, familiar scent of rosewater and fresh bread that usually hung about her when she was at home.

Will's phone buzzed in his pocket and he scooped it out with shaking hands. A text from Zeller, *"We're at your house. Think we found a few things, come when you can.*"

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"Check this out," Brian Zeller said when Will came rushing into the kitchen of the house he shared with Hanninbal.

The forensics expert was crouched on the floor, holding one of the dogs' bowls to the side so that the contents were easy to see. It was Buster's bowl, to be exact, and Will could see a thin sheen of a white, glossy liquid sticking to the inside corners.

Wanting all evidence to remain intact, Will had boarded the dogs with a great service he trusted in Catonsville, where his pets would be well cared for and kept far from danger. Hence, the bowls still bore the traces of the last dinner the dogs had each consumed on the night when Hannibal was taken.

"Is that a remnant of drugs?" Will asked, dropping to a crouch beside Zeller.

"Yeah -- I'd say acepromazine and Telazol powder just taking a quick look here…" Zeller bagged Buster's bowl and stood, placing the plastic-encased evidence on the island counter.

Will nodded. That combination would put the dogs to sleep without causing them any harm.

Zeller finished packing up and added, “Let me get it back to the lab and I can tell you for sure within two hours.”

“Thank you, Brian.” Will patted the other man’s shoulder with a brief, warm squeeze, and his friend nodded, kindness in his expressive azure eyes, no trace of the usual cynicism or sarcasm.

“Don’t mention it. If anything ever happened to Jimmy, I’d...anyway, we’re all here for you, man.” Brian exchanged goodbyes-for-now nods at Will, then headed briskly out to one of the two black SUV’s in the driveway.

Beverly and Jimmy came into the kitchen then, fresh from a search of the basement.

“Hi, guys,” Will greeted, washed out and sad, but operating under a fresh push of angry zest, having defeated his insecurities. Every moment of searching and analyzing brought him closer to Hannibal’s captor, closer to saving his lover and tasting his own sweet, brutal revenge.

“Hi,” Beverly sighed, wrapping Will in a warm hug. “Will, if there’s anything…”

“That’s what Zeller said. I know, Bev, I know, really. Thank you,” Will smiled, a wobbly one that faded quickly into a pained flat line.

“Of course,” Jimmy added, as unusually devoid of humor as his partner. There wasn’t much else to say, making Agent Price’s grim brief way of replying the most eloquent response, embodying it all.

The world was upside down: it was thoroughly okay not to be okay.

“It’s fine, Jimmy, you should head back to the lab, help Zeller with the evidence he compiled,” Will said, making the dismissal as fond as he could. He had to have every team member right where they should be for the most advantageous application of their skills.

Jimmy bade them a quiet goodbye and departed, then Beverly shot Will a pointed look.

“Here’s what we found,” Beverly put in, spreading a blueprint of the house on the counter, pointing as she explained to several places in the basement plan which she had circled in red.

“There are tunnels underneath this house, you know that?” She braced her hands on the counter and nodded down at the blueprints.

“Yeah, they date back from the underground railroad,” Will elaborated, following her gaze to the accurate rendition of the winding tunnels.

He sent up a silent prayer of gratitude to a hazily imagined deity that he and Hannibal had recently “cleaned out the basement” in anticipation of their involvement in Chilton’s trial, and any chance that the wrong person might ask to examine their residence, where “The Chesapeake Ripper” had supposedly attacked them at one point.

Once a veritable dungeon for the Ripper's wickedly bloody games, all aesthetically severe chains and torture devices with a macabre wine cellar equally filled with freezers housing victims' remains, the basement was now presentable as an "under construction" future downstairs den. Whatever else the forensics team might uncover down there, the Ripper's true identity and Will's own involvement were safe secrets.

"That's definitely how the kidnappers got in, but riddle me this," Beverly continued, that grim note of humorless humor her usual defense and/or coping mechanism.

She was worried for Will, worried for Hannibal on Will's behalf, and -- caring woman she was -- it was wearing on her, too.

"How the hell did they know about the tunnels? Is the house registered as a historical landmark with the City of Baltimore? Did Hannibal preserve the tunnels because he was required to by law -- preservation society and all that?" She tapped the entrance on the map where the plans showed one long, winding tunnel eventually emptying a subterranean traveler on the street behind the house.

"No, it's fairly common to find those tunnels in this region. Hannibal said he preserved them out of respect," Will explained.

While that had been a sincere part of the reason; the tunnels' convenience for coming and going from violent crime scenes was perhaps the main motivation. Will didn't doubt Hannibal would have left the tunnels anyway, even in some alternate universe where he wasn't a killer. He was like that...humanistic, cherishing the struggles of the righteously strong against their despicable oppressors...Hannibal had his own sort of honor, underneath his armor of pride and further beneath his frightening monster who craved carnage. Will loved him so terribly, so much.

He scratched his jaw, which itched incessantly, and realized he now had a full-on beard, vaguely wondering when that had a chance to happen before the idea faded away, completely lacking in meaning or importance. His temples pulsed constantly with the same razor-sharp tremors of pain, his stomach growling so loudly that even Beverly heard it and straightened up, arching a brow.

"How long's it been since you ate, drank some water or slept?" She basically demanded to know, wry but very concerned, a glimmer in her warm eyes speaking the truth. Will looked like hell and he knew it.

"C'mon, you sound like my mom," Will complained, giving her back the same tired sass. He strode the fridge dutifully, opened an imported bottle of Vichy Catalan mineral water, the very sight of the pretentious item making his heart clutch, *Hannibal*, and tossed the cap into the recycling bin on the floor.

He held the bottle out towards Beverly, silently saying "see?" with his haggard and numb smirk. Then he took a long, cold, bubbly swig and swallowed, realizing immediately how dry his throat had been, like a dessert. The taste of water reminded him he needed it, and he had downed the whole thing almost in a single gulp a few minutes later, between breaths from sore lungs.

“What else did Mama Graham say?” Beverly asked, taking an apple from the big bowl on the counter and turning it several times to examine the flawless Fuji.

Like all the fruit which met with Hannibal’s approval during his hilariously long grocery store visits, the apple was so perfect, gleaming in crisp shades of red and yellow-green, that it almost looked fake, a decorative plastic prop. Still, Beverly did not hesitate to mar its appearance by setting it on the cutting board and slicing it up, soon after spreading sugary store-brand peanut butter on it, swiped from the top shelf where Will kept all his junk food.

“She said...I won’t be any good to Hannibal if I’m half-dead from hunger and exhaustion,” Will admitted ruefully. “No wonder you two get along so well.”

Beverly handed him the plate of apple smeared with peanut butter and Will took exactly one tiny bite of one protein-laden corner. “Okay, okay, so you’re both right,” he allowed, eating slowly because every little bit was so hard to chew and swallow. “Thank you.”

“You could sit down,” Beverly suggested.

“Let’s not go too far,” Will retorted, gesturing to himself while gaining a slight whiff of body odor when he lifted his arm. *So. Shower. Right. Those exist. And are necessary.*

“Would you say I’m more mountain man or zombie?” he asked, now halfway through his snack.

“Creature from the black lagoon,” Beverly replied in a split second, mercilessly.

Will huffed a painful laugh that came out like a grunt. “I’m going to shower and nap, then get back to work.”

“Sounds awesome, unless you’re lying to me -- but even that proves you’re aware enough that you’re not going to faint and hit your head on something and make me really mad,” she answered briskly, tossing on her maroon leather jacket then flipping her long, raven hair over the collar.

“Haha. Are you gonna…”

“Spend the rest of the day and possibly the night poring over all the minuscule pieces of maybe-evidence we gathered from the basement? Of course,” she replied with reassuring determination. “We got this, Graham, you don’t have to micromanage.”

“Hard not to,” he winced.

Jeez, he knew she knew how to do her job better than any forensic analyst in the whole bureau, along with Jimmy and Brian. What’s more, she was exhausting every shred of her considerable talent to help him and save Hannibal. He briefly felt like a shitty friend, until Beverly caught sight of his downcast guilty eyes and corrected him.

“Hey. I know.” She smiled on her way out of the kitchen. “You rest up.”

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Will managed to get himself clean from head to toe and changed into another flannel shirt that didn't smell like moldy coffee or the terrible gas station cigarettes he'd sucked down lately at night to try and stave off his panic. An old teen habit, smoking, one he hadn't bothered with since. An old habit, dangerously vulnerable, like something else he had not done since he was a teenager: let himself feel goddamn helpless.

He had deodorant on but that was the extent of his efforts otherwise; he didn't have time to shave or treat his unruly curls to anything better than a few swipes with his fingers so that the wet locks were currently slicked back from his brow - later they would be a mess.

But for now, by his current insane standards he looked more than presentable, a conclusion he verified with a quick nod at his reflection in the full-length bedroom mirror. He had a lot more doors to knock on -- working his way through the long list of his and Hannibal's acquaintances seeking suspects and leads, and the less crazy he looked, the easier it would be to turn on the old Will Graham charm and get in those doors.

Hardest of all, maybe, was trying not to think about Hannibal's suffering or that his life was in danger, but those thoughts really would drive him over the brink. Every time they intruded, he had to shut it down. What he needed to be now was a machine. He could give into his grief at this crisis later, when he had his lover back in his arms and they comforted each other.

As he packed a quick bag of necessary supplies - small and deadly weapons, his wallet, FBI badge, suspect list and clues notes and pen, and so on, he was annoyed by a ring of the doorbell.

Ripping the door open impatiently, dying to already be on the road hunting more leads, he was well past irritated to see Alana Bloom standing there with that really annoying "endlessly patient and put-upon kindergarten teacher" expression on her condescending face.

Ever since finding out she was formerly Hannibal's would-be conquest and flirtation partner, Will's casual and somewhat amused disdain for her had blossomed into a desperate hatred. She really didn't want to fuck with him right now, and Will hoped for her sake she didn't put one tiny little pedicured toe out of line.

"I'm busy, Alana," Will snapped, trying to gently shoulder past her.

"I know that -- and I'm sorry about what happened to Hannibal," she began almost demurely, although as Will stepped back, since she had not let him past or escalated him to violence yet, he noticed a glint of determination in her crystal blue gaze.

She was...nervous...but sure of this, whatever the foolish reason she had the nerve to darken his door at such a time. Alana felt she had no choice but to confront him.

"We don't *know* what happened to Hannibal, and that's why I need to go, right now, and get back to finding him before anything *else* happens." Will's jaw threatened to lock with outright rage and anxiety, a potentially catastrophic mixture which boded ill for Alana's future. "I would have thought that obvious."

“It is, but I’m here to discuss something else with you that can’t wait. Can I come in?” She batted her lashes as if there wasn’t a wall of ice between her wiles and his capacity to like her.

“Get it over with,” he demanded, steely-voiced as he allowed her to walk into the front hall.

He did not offer coffee or tea. Instead, he crossed his arms over his faded yellow and brown flannel and glared.

Alana sighed, the perpetual martyr. She was the only one in their unit who did things by the book, how hard that must be. Or maybe she should get out of the goddamn unit. Will was ready to help her with that.

“This is my profile on the Vigilante,” she announced, drawing a slender file folder from her olive green shoulder bag.

She tried to pass it to Will, who scoffed, “Summarize it for me. Start with why you would come here, knowing what I must be going through, to discuss the little busy-work Jack deems you capable enough to handle.”

Alana’s mouth tensed. Fear really did make Will rude, as Jack had once astutely observed; but panic over Hannibal, mingled with jealousy and hate, was enough to make him something far worse.

“As a courtesy,” she said bluntly, patience finally snapping under the weight of Will’s harsh refusal to be “reasonable.” Shoving the file back in her bag, she crossed her arms, too, glaring at him.

“It’s you, Will. The profile.” She said this as if it were some grand revelation.

Will’s lip curled into a rakish sneer, but he had no further reaction. Alana blinked at him, clearly baffled.

“My profile on the Vigilante reveals a man who is identically *you* in background, personality and habits,” she tacked on, assuming Will must not have fully understood her original statement.

“And?”

He scowled, the picture of a sullen, unapologetic villain, like Lord Byron publicly called out for promiscuity. Will was equally prepared for a *dual,* if need be, or possibly just to blow off steam.

“And,” Alana went on, caught somewhere between nervous, frustrated and angry, “As your colleague, I felt it was only honorable for me to come here and tell you that before I go to Jack with this.”

“You think I’m *the Vigilante,* Dr. Bloom?” Will asked, sing-song, mocking, breathy.

“I don’t know.” She shifted the strap on her bag, shifted her feet in their emerald shoes to match her green and black zebra print wrap dress, two steps back, almost stumbling.

He bet she dressed real cute in grad school when she first met Hannibal, probably really slutted it up on the days she knew she would be consulting with her older, sexy advisor Dr. Lecter, God knows Will would have. If he was lucky enough to meet Hannibal earlier in life, Will would have worn his most devilishly seductive outfits to class and any private tutoring meetings. He could just see a younger Alana in a skimpier rendition of the current, body-hugging silk get-up, batting her big prairie sky blue eyes up at her respected mentor, getting a little too close when they worked together, shoulders brushing, fingers accidentally doing the same from time to time -- Alana getting a little giddy on the warmth of Hannibal’s body so close, the scent of his spicy, manly cologne, so sophisticated and effortless, like the rest of him. Hannibal, amused by her youthful wiles but not uninterested, flirting lightly, gifting her his time and admiration, his guidance, all those quirky little jokes he liked to scatter into the conversations he shared with *intimates.*

He uncrossed his arms. “I’m surprised you haven’t already taken this to Jack. Aren’t you worried that if I *am* this ‘Vigilante,’ I might just cut my losses -- kill you and shred your file before Jack ever gets to hear about your adorable *suspicions*?”

Alana’s mouth opened and closed like a fish suddenly tossed from water to rocky land. “Of course you wouldn’t hurt me, Will. We’re friends.”

“A minute ago you described us as ‘colleagues.’”

“Maybe that’s a little closer to the truth, sure,” Alana allowed, stepping flush against the front door now, her back pressed to it, hand reaching for the golden knob to make a quick escape.

“*Hannibal* is my friend,” she added in a rush of panic, turning paler than usual, throwing the berry shade of her lips into sharp contrast.

She looked so pretty that combined with her unfortunately astute profiling, horrible timing in confronting him, and the nerve she showed in mentioning Hannibal, it pushed Will all the way into the red.

“Why don’t you just get his name out of your filthy *mouth*?” Will said in an unmistakably lethal rage.

Alana was shaking now from head to toe, twisting the doorknob right before Will was close enough to lock it again and slam the flat of his hand into her throat, savagely bruising her larynx and staring at her with wild blue wrath.

“Bet you think I only kill evil-doers, based on your profile,” he went on, grit in his voice under the effort of shoving harder pressure to her throat, pinning her while she kept fighting, the weakening movements of her slight limbs no threat to him. “But you don’t know about the night I murdered two men in a restroom at the Baltimore opera simply because I was bored, anxious, and didn’t like the way they *looked* at Hannibal.”

He raised his eyebrows and smirked at Alana's shocked face while the color kept draining from it. Leaning in even close, flexing his hand then gripping her neck tighter, he said "*My* Hannibal," savage self-satisfaction contorting his handsome features to monstrous effect.

"There you go, Alana, that's right," he cooed, reaching his free hand down to yank free the silky green belt of her wrap dress. "*Shut up,*" he commanded in a vicious rasp.

Balling it up, he broke her jaw and crammed the belt down her throat, agony painting her features up until she blacked out from unbearable pain, then crumpled to the floor dead.

"Did you enjoy the show?" he said aloud after a few moments had allowed him to regain his steady breathing and lean down to retrieve Alana's folder on the Vigilante. "What did you think?"

Hmm. Most likely her laptop was out in her car. So: If he destroyed that, there would probably be no further trace of her profile on him.

"What did I think?" said the stranger's voice, feminine, plum-dark and deep, draped in a silky accent, not Hannibal's same accent but Hannibal's same honey-slow confidence.

This was the voice of whoever he'd sensed had been watching him in the house all afternoon, a shadow stalking from room to room, *almost* completely silent and undetectable; so, he supposed, she must be a hunter like himself and Hannibal. Showing due respect for the skill involved, he had not acknowledged the home intrusion and stalking up until now. With all else he had on his plate and his ongoing misery, Will had felt nothing more than fleeting curiosity about who might be watching him.

He looked from Alana's corpse to the folder in his hands, which still ached from the thrilling act of murdering Dr. Bloom, then glanced, nonchalant as could be, at the young woman who now stood across the front hall, notably unimpressed.

She was stunning in a quietly ethereal way. While tall, she was dainty, and while dainty, she was also naturally imposing. Dressed simply but tastefully in a long, dark overcoat, sheer black blouse over a matching camisole and sleek black leggings, with her curly raven tresses cut in an asymmetrical bob, her icy gaze seemed to go right through Will with laser focus.

Now this is interesting... Will regarded her with rapid analytical scrutiny, sapphire eyes flicking over her cool features.

"You're here," he shrugged, "May as well weigh in."

"Very well." The woman's composed expression momentarily fluttered into a charming but quite accusing scowl. "I thought it was childish."

Chapter End Notes

Song ref notes - I really can't believe that Kacey Musgraves song has the lyric "after the gold rush" in it -- it feels like a sign of encouragement from the universe - I listened to it a million times this summer.

I was also thinking of Maren Morris' song "The Bones" during the scene with Will and Maddie. I've updated the playlist to reflect all the songs from chapters to date and even a few from upcoming chapters 😉
https://open.spotify.com/playlist/4WeoEljZNjydQouKxoEISf?si=8fb9ce3b43c5430b

Next time: Will's chase is about to lead him right to the door of Hannibal's captor -- and now he has some of the best possible help by his side.

interlude: the happy phantom

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I heard Confucius does his crosswords with a pen,” Will announced, apropos of nothing but their usual quietly comfortable philosophical chats.

He leaned back and struck a graceful but relaxed posture in the rather rigid antique Lithuanian dining chair from the table round which Hannibal used to take his meals as a child, until...

The fire trail end of that sad tremor in Hannibal's deep waters flickered into tiny licks of ephemeral confusion before disappearing, reincarnated as tiny blue butterflies with glistening crystal wings, soaring up into clouds puffed plump in the cashmere cotton blend grey-blue sky,

“You have a sweater that color,” Hannibal mused, watching Will’s slow smile spread as he crossed his legs, pretty and strong hands with their long fingers loosely threaded over his knee.

From his vantage point on the other dining room chair, which aside from the stiff back was more comfortable than he had recalled, he could not help the shy grin that flashed across his aching face when Will smiled like that. He did not turn and make eye contact with Hannibal, just sat there looking ineffably handsome, chocolate curls half-tamed with gel but still a few unfurling sweetly about his ears and brow, the dark wash jeans clinging to luscious thighs and biteable legs the way Hannibal wanted to. He licked his lips and added mildly, despite growing desire sparkling in his golden eyes, “You’ll accuse me of dodging the unasked question.”

“You can solve this with a pen, Hannibal.” Will turned then, sat backwards on the chair and put his hands over the top of the gold-flecked raven piece (this was Royal furniture, the family’s best, long since...where had the furniture gone again?) More butterflies took to the sky, twirling in balletic spins and then disintegrating into glitter. The glitter grew into glassy snowflakes that cascaded in long swoops downward, and the snow that blanketed the ground as far as he could see was the first snow of some unknown winter, soft, clean, begging to be played in.

There was nothing here except for the miles and miles of snow, and the skating pond where the children were learning how to form figure eights while their fond parents urged them on then cheered. There was only the snow here, any fleeting concern gone with a simple flutter of wings. Perhaps it could always have been this easy, if he only could have stopped happening long enough to recognize the chance.

“Hannibal.” Will put his chin on his elbows crossed over the top of the chair, not shivering although he wore only a low-necked white t-shirt, the hard lines of his firm biceps making

Hannibal's mouth water. He looked like an especially sophisticated and naughtily teasing exotic dancer at the moment. "Are you paying attention?"

"Oh, yes." Softly, Hannibal slid from his chair, went on hands and knees and crawled to Will, arriving at his side to rub his cheek on his lover's denim-clad thigh. Will sighed, always remiss to deny him any affection, and ran slow fingers through Hannibal's hair, massaging his scalp.

"Where's your pen?" Will persisted. "Don't let go. I'm out there looking for you right now, and I need you to be ready when I arrive. If you're here, you'll go deeper until I can't find you."

"But here is so perfect." Hannibal sat contentedly in the snow, breathing in the cologne he had given to Will on Thanksgiving morning, spicy saffron and woodsy resin absolute catnip to him, clinging to Will's smooth, pale skin. "Remember how you blushed when I gave you this perfume? And told me that Thanksgiving is not a gift-giving holiday."

Will laughed open-hearted and delighted, threading his fingers through Hannibal's overgrown hair, rubbing the sides of his bearded face, finding the places on the back of his neck where the pain from being strapped to the cot was the worst and starting to knead out the tension. Again feline in his devoted ecstasy, Hannibal let out a moan tantamount to a purr.

"Georgio Armani, for fuck's sake." Will slid from his own chair and grinned as he sat beside Hannibal. He wrapped an arm around his boyfriend's shoulders and Hannibal snuggled in, resting his head on Will's shoulder, nuzzling and kissing his neck.

His lips were chapped and raw, rough on Will's exquisite, smooth neck but Will let him go on and on doing that, no other comment for a few minutes except for a low moan of assent while he ran a thoughtful finger up and down the line of Hannibal's shoulder bones. "Your tolerance for pain is too high. You have to remember how to hurt or you'll fall asleep forever here."

Hannibal knew Will meant the way he did not whine at the sharp pain in his shoulders, too stiff from days of forced immobility. But he didn't want to think about those things.

"I used to think if I died, I'd be the happy phantom," he confided, playfully tugging the sleeve of Will's shirt with his fangs before nipping the boy's beautifully muscled arm. "I'd chase the nuns around the churchyard, run naked through the streets without my mask on, never need umbrellas in the rain. What right would I have to complain?"

"Wild strawberries every morning, in the palms of your hands, more than you could carry." Will flopped down on the snow and made an angel, stretching arms and legs out, staring up at the growing flood of butterflies in the sky, enough of them that they had begun to blot the dapple of sunglow.

"I am impressed with your ability to criticize my judgements without explicitly saying you disapprove." Hannibal fell onto his back beside Will and their fingers automatically threaded together on the powdery snow.

“Have you thought about what you’re wearing?” Will looked at him straight on and Hannibal never could hide from those eyes.

“You know that I don’t want to.” He sat up and shook his head stubbornly. He felt the scratchy fabric of the scrubs more palpable against his bruised and starved, parched body, the way his throat squeezed in thirst and his ankles felt as if they weren’t there. The butterflies above them did not look so friendly anymore, darker and larger.

“I know I need you to, and I know you’re going to be good for me, honey, and do as I tell you.”

“You want me to be him again?” Hannibal asked, nodding down the hill at the skating pond where a five year old child version of himself skated already perfectionistic patterns on the gleaming ice. On the border of the lake, his mother cheered his name while holding a toddler Mischa on her hip, both of them in pink earmuffs and matching coats, his father in a long black coat and a Victorian top hat chiming in with constructive advice on improving his precision.

“Let him skate, darling,” his mother said, swatting his arm, and Hannibal sighed.

“I’ve made them too much like your parents. Mine never came when I skated; and Mischa would have been napping in the afternoon at that age. Still, that is me, as I was and you may think it behooves me to go back to that belief in the world’s possibilities, that no one will hurt me for their own cruel recreation, that love will last forever, but I can’t see the logic.” Hannibal knew he could not hold out much longer; if Will wanted something he would eventually cede it over despite his own preferences.

“No. I don’t want you to be him.” Will watched the ice skating boy carefully, noting his childish but easily recognized features and how as a kid, Hannibal’s aristocratic cheekbones were smattered with light freckles, how his hair had started sandy before darkening to a mixture of shades he often tried to count the variations of, only to complain that Hannibal’s hair was too pretty. “Although he is absolutely adorable.”

“We need who you were after you were him,” Will elaborated.

“Do you remember what you said on Thanksgiving morning when I kissed your belly at the end, before we dressed for dinner?” Hannibal tried for a subject change, rubbing his dry, sandpaper skin hands over each other. He felt suddenly clammy, hot and cold at the same time.

“I said ‘no one’s ever fucked me that hard in my whole life,’” Will smirked, “And it was true. I can still taste how good the sex was, and I can hear you *growling* my name. You tied my wrists to the bedposts and called me baby, you bit me all over and spanked me, the smell of your perfume and your mark on my skin was driving you so crazy. I loved it. You were perfect, but please stop trying to change the subject and listen to me before I give you a good slap in the face.”

Hannibal pressed his lips together to keep from saying something inappropriate that might make Will angry.

“*Don’t* make a comment about how me slapping your face would only make you hornier,” Will warned sternly.

“I wouldn’t use the word ‘horny,’” Hannibal corrected.

“We’re going for a walk, troublemaker,” Will informed him, taking his hand again and leading him down the large round hill towards the children and families surrounding the ice.

“We never had neighbors like this to play with,” Hannibal mused as his younger self started a snowball fight with two other boys. Mischa was sitting in the snow, poking tiny holes in its puffy surface, small serious face rapt at her every discovery of texture and gravity, and his parents had disappeared.

“All I know is this should be Bailey park,” he frowned, and Will nodded.

“Be the animal you were after the men came,” Will begged him, “I know that it burns and it would be so much easier to subside. But it isn’t time for that yet. And you wouldn’t want to be the happy phantom alone.”

“No, not anymore.” Hannibal forced himself to look down at the ugly lavender medical scrubs he wore, at his bare feet and his wrists, both encircled by rough straps. At the pale anemic cast of his skin. “It’s very painful, being that animal, Will. And I was doing so well ignoring the pain.”

“Remember. How you felt when they took her. You’d do anything to survive and make them pay,” Will insisted. “Even eat her, for she gave you the strength to take them all on. You made mincemeat of their villainy, you Became for her. Become for me now.”

Will had led him further, so that they stood at the center of the skating pond and everyone was gone now except the two of them and little Hannibal, even littler Mischa.

“You’re scaring us, Hannibal,” little Hannibal accused. “Stay with us and let Will stay,” Mischa lisped. Their eyes were huge.

Will clasped Hannibal’s face between his hands and rubbed his aching jaw, then pressed a sweet, warming kiss to lips that must feel repulsive, dry and scaly, but he treated Hannibal like the most precious of men. “I’m so proud of you.”

He stepped back and the ice finished melting under Hannibal’s feet. He fell through the hole into the freezing water and darkness, but he could still see Will’s encouraging smile, so he turned himself around and swam down, down,

Chapter End Notes

The interlude contains several references to the lyrics from Tori Amos' song "Happy Phantom": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RfpFs8N7CmA

When you're sleeping

Will was quite sure the holster he glimpsed beneath the stranger's coat contained a formidable weapon at which she was an expert shot, yet apparently he seemed so pathetic at the moment that she did not bother to hold a gun on him by way of introduction.

He sighed, not overly perturbed, but slightly miffed, "It's kind of condescending, you know, breaking into my house and skulking around in the shadows, then witnessing me killing a co-worker in cold blood, and you're not even pointing a gun at me -- even though you have one."

Will rolled his eyes at the woman's unchanged, stony expression. She was intently waiting for him to stop being "childish" so she could explain whyever she was here and for that matter, who she was.

He rolled his head around his shoulders, grateful for the release of monumental tension in his bones and muscles which he had obtained through murder. God, he should have killed someone days ago. Now in the verile flush of the fresh kill, he had never felt more ready to launch back into action, as soon as he dealt with this strangely haunting young woman, that was.

"Childish," she repeated emphatically, urgency flaring in her dark eyes. "We do not have the luxury of wasting time disposing of your co-worker's corpse and car, yet you leave us no choice."

"*We? Us?*" Will repeated.

"I will explain while helping you with this," she replied coolly, nodding down at Alana.

A strange brew of sympathy for Will's victim, disapproval for his actions and steely resignation swirled in her mysterious eyes, making Will keenly aware she must know Hannibal. Nobody trained their features like that without being exposed to certain highly specific circumstances, such as affection for someone whose brutality one could not reconcile to their other virtues.

With deft familiarity in such matters, she began rolling Alana's body up in the rug. "Hurry, she will be heavier soon and more difficult to move. Go and dispose of that file in Hannibal's study."

The woman's voice was soft, eloquent English enclosed in a foreign accent, most likely Japanese. There was no space for disobedience to her commands, since her attitude and composure automatically inspired Will's respect.

Will's brow crinkled, confusion mounting at her every move and word, but he went without further ado to the study and shredded the Vigilante profile, returning to find the woman unrolling a considerable length of canvas.

He helped her to wrap the Alana murder burrito in an extra layer of slick, shiny blue tarp, which Will recognized from the collection of such items he and Hannibal had left in the basement -- helping the former cannabilistic dungeon to look like a perfectly normal future den under construction.

As they lugged Alana to her own car and heaved her into the trunk, snow cascaded down on them in the dim twilight and the quiet street bore unconcerned witness to the suspicious procedure; the neighbors were all inside their comfortably decadent homes, nursing their New Years weekend hangovers and enjoying the last few holiday rerun specials on tv.

Will shut the trunk and glanced at his new acquaintance archly, snowflakes nestled in his brunette curls and clinging to her night-dark bob before melting, although she never did. In her bearing as they had worked, in her indefinable mystique and natural flair for dramatic elegance, Will easily read a familiar aura.

“You’re related to Hannibal,” he guessed, “Or you’re...part of him somehow, an integral piece of his past.”

“I am his Aunt and Uncle’s ward. Hannibal, Mischa and I were raised together. As such, I am something of an adopted sister.”

He nodded, thoughtful. “I thought so. Will Graham.” He put his hand out and she shook it with the world’s tiniest twitch of an almost-smile.

“Chiyoh.” She put a hand, encased in black leather gloves, up and added simply, “Your car keys.”

Will grabbed them from his jeans’ pocket and tossed them to her. “Your phone?” he said, putting his own hand out. Once she handed her cell phone over, Will added himself as a contact. “In case we lose each other.”

He need hardly add the obvious: “*You follow me while I dispose of Alana and her car, then we’ll go together to investigate the next few suspects in Hannibal’s kidnapping.*” She had been watching him all afternoon and knew what he planned to do.

She was Hannibal’s sister; Will knew why she was there, and communicating with her carried the same flow as doing the same with his lover: the patterns were the same, the assumptions and intentions therefore predictable between them.

“You trust me?” he was a bit baffled by that part, although otherwise he was sure she would not bother to help him or want his assistance finding Hannibal.

“No. But you know how to kill,” Chiyoh reasoned. “And you truly love Hannibal. I trust you to save him.”

…..

“How did you know he was missing?” Will asked when they were in his car together, driving on the highway towards the next name on his suspect list. “I called every number Hannibal

had, most of which turned out to be impersonal: clothiers, imported deli, perfumeries, interior design consultants, his usual style of concern -- all of it organized by some code even I couldn't crack. But there wasn't a single number that connected me to his family. I wanted you all to know he was missing."

His insistent tone told the story of the past few days of being the only one heading this search, no Lecter family behind him lending support or corroborating his worry.

"Hannibal is a creature of habit," Chiyoh explained.

Will carefully slowed the car to avoid skidding on a sleek ice puddle as he pulled off the highway and down an urban street; the snow above them had stilled to nothing but black night sky; the streets were full of festivity.

"He always writes me three times a month, on the fifth, the fifteenth and the twenty-fifth. Because when we were children, my favorite and luckiest number was five," Chiyoh elaborated. "The last letter never arrived. I knew something was wrong. Then he was not answering his phone. As I never ring him, I was sure my suspicions were correct. He would have answered for me."

A father with his little girl sat on his shoulders waved cordially to Will as the profiler stopped the car to let them cross the street towards a food truck selling hot cocoa and new years sparklers.

"He never told me about you," Will said, making another cautious turn onto the street he'd been looking for, *now to find number 200…*

"Hannibal does not talk about the past," Chiyoh replied. It was amazing the way she was both calm and tense at the same time. "He can't."

"I'm worried about what happened to you both to make you feel you need to be that strong."

"Nothing happened." Her voice was like the shiniest, most unbreakable steel, words irrefutable. "We happened."

"Does it make you feel safer, saying that?" His brow lifted as he pulled up to the big iron gate before the huge old house that didn't at all fit into the bustling community of working class, young families. He put the car in park and looked at her, but he was talking to Hannibal and they both knew it. "Hiding yourself behind an armor of pride."

"What is an armor to fear if you hold the key? No one has ever found my key, but if they did, I would change, as Hannibal has changed. You must wait for him when he needs to be silent. There are places inside himself where he thinks he can never go again, even to bring you to the truth of him. Places in this world he needs but fears to revisit, wounds that cannot heal with time."

Will nodded, "Thank you."

She gave him that same flicker of softness in her quick almost-smile.

The Lecter family seemed to emerge from an untouchable, almost unimaginable dark ether, floating through time and space, exuding a fractured complexity always out of Will's reach to comprehend. He saw it in Hannibal, he saw it in Chiyoh. No one could question they were siblings. Despite her great beauty, he never felt a twinge of jealousy, on this specific count: they bled from the same old wound. Hannibal could not see her that way, nor she him. They were...conjoined on an entirely different count.

They got out of the car and Will picked the rusty locks stacked on the gate. The iron entrance gave a grating squeal when Will opened the gate door, and he winced at the noise. Ahead of them stretched a long gravel walk, the rocks scattered with melting snow and dirt; the path had not been cleaned in ages and simply did whatever the weather proclaimed it should do, probably a mess of scrabbled stones and mud when it rained, a baked disaster of minuscule rubble when the summer sun blazed on this strange old estate.

They walked up to the house, on guard for any signs of trouble.

"Do you want a family, Chiyoh?"

"Hannibal is my family," she said politely, adjusting her black leather gloves. "His aunt and uncle have always been more...distant. As his parents were. Mischa was different."

"I know, he told me that," Will smiled, kind, "but she's gone and we're still here. I take it you are a wanderer."

"Yes. I am looking for the one who has the key to my armor, and I will wander listless until I find them. I used to have a prisoner at Lecter Castle, one of Mischa's killers, whom I pledged Hannibal to watch over, as I would not allow his murder. But that prisoner expired in his sleep of starvation six months ago. Then my prison sentence ended and I began my journey. I travel alone. I go everywhere."

Will got it, he did. It sounded like him before Hannibal, eternally restless and impossible to tie down or satisfy. "I mean if you don't want to run away into 'everywhere,' which truth be told is a beautiful thing to do, if that's really what you want. I'd never fault you. But if you wanted family, there is one here for you, and people who would value and love you. I promise. You don't have to be alone unless…"

"I believe you have overrated the concept of family," she said, a bit wry now. "But it only needs your introduction to Hannibal's uncle to show why we do not feel the need to define our lives by having one."

"Hey. Just think about it. You could drop in for a visit more often than never until there's a life or death emergency," Will suggested.

"I will consider your invitation."

They were closer now and both appraised the looming house.

"Who lives here?" she asked, tucking a glossy curl behind one delicate ear. Will told her.

The place had been splendid once, to be sure. He could glean as much from the withering frame of the big Victorian and its high and mighty gates, the leering gargoyle statues imposing even with the chips on their heads, fists and gnarled claw feet. The statue's eyes seemed to glare specially at the unexpected, uninvited visitors and a shiver went down Will's spine.

"What is it?" Chiyoh inquired.

"It's...my spidey senses," Will said drily, not having time to go into the whole empathy "disorder", that heightened awareness and instinct of killers and danger, the way his body keened into perceptions of small details indicating Not Rightness, One of these things is not Like the others, and knew, always knew where to dig for the bones.

The house, from its initial austentatious Edwardian glamor, had become a relic out of time and place among the otherwise ordinary and modern elements of this neighborhood, the strip malls with their Chinese restaurants, pizza parlors, tanning and nail salons, the discount clothing stores and laundromats with bright neon signs, the liquor store across the street with a huge Corona Light poster and an enormous freezer beside the door and a marker-scrawled sign, "FREE ICE!" - the original owners of this house would be disgusted with how the mighty site of their proud fortress to fashion and power had been marred by everything conveniently new and easy and flash, no more horseless carriage rides to church on Sunday and no more balls with eligible young men and women of rank dancing to find their future spouses, dancing in a dreamless sleep of a life, no more petticoats and gentlemen to gift pianofortes on sunny afternoons sipped away into peaceful teacups. This place was done for, and anything about it seemed sad.

Something in Chiyoh's face went unexpectedly forlorn at the sight of the place; a glimmer in dark eyes which looked to Will like recognition or a haunted nostalgia.

"You've seen a place like this before," Will suggested, examining the front door with its heavy brass knocker, then lifting it and bestowing several loud smacks. If someone was home (who could call this place a home?) they damn sure heard him knocking.

"Yes." Soft and blunt, "A broken temple of what was once the sight of great contentment. Having survived such an age, one recognizes its remains if seen elsewhere."

"Place reminds me of a sarcophagus," Will muttered, impatiently glancing at the windows on the sides of the front door before knocking again and yelling, "Hello? Anyone home? We just have a few easy questions for you and you'd be helping us a lot. We don't bite, I promise."

His fake-friendly voice did not throw Chiyoh for a loop; she had seen enough of him to know he was a skilled conman. Anytime he wanted, he could shift from deadly serious to the sweetest, most cordial and helpful visitor, gathering clues, ready for a cup of coffee and tea with biscuits, a brief chat and get out of your hair, so put together, attractive and charming that no one on the suspect list had yet been able to resist letting him inside and answering all of his questions.

"Like if I look at it the wrong way, the seal will fly open, who knows what else would float out on all that dust?" He'd gone back to murmuring only to Chiyoh, casing the place for

breaking in if no one answered pretty soon; his eyes were gloomy, dark and commanding on every entry point, and Chiyoh murmured back on another knowing gothic sigh, “Nothing good.”

“What is she like, this student of yours who lives here?”

“Annoying,” Will explained, deciding on the window and wrapping his scarf around his gloved hand to break it. “Pretentious, a little-knowing know-it-all. Something about her doesn’t sit right with me, but most of my students are weird. You don’t want to become a forensic profiler because you’re a round peg. Cami Carmichael is just the next name on my *list* of odd bird students, but--”

Suddenly, the heavy front door opened on a pained sounding groan of old, half-rotted wood and there stood Cami, dressed in a tan terry bathrobe with her short hair hanging wet around her peach-creamy little face. Will pulled back the scarf-covered fist with which he’d been about to break her front window in.

“Professor Graham,” she smiled, as if surprised but pleased to see him. On several of her fingers on the door, Will noticed smears of beige nail lacquer, as if she had been interrupted in the middle of her post-shower beauty routine. He could smell the acrid polish and the green tea of her shampoo but beyond that and all through the house behind her there seemed to emanate a telling sourness of scent.

“Hi, Cami, so sorry to disturb you like this in the middle of the night,” Will said, smoothly apologetic so that he almost believed in his own sincerity (that was the mood when he always told the best lies). “My associate and I are conducting an investigation, and one part of the case brought to my mind your observation from the lecture two weeks ago - when we discussed the Chesapeake Ripper?”

“Oh, of course. You’ve come to consult me,” Cami said, fluttering a small soft hand to the low dip in the front of her robe where her cleavage had been intentionally allowed to show. She must have glimpsed them through the window and prepared herself accordingly, fast, probably that’s where the nail polish got wrecked. Will’s eyes and mind kept moving faster. She had a line of nail polish on the front collar of the robe and another light dash of it on the side of her breast; her feet were bare and painted the same drab earth tone.

There was the outline of a syringe in her robe pocket and a large sewing needle stuck right through the upper top collar of the soft brown fabric, as if for a quick stab if she needed, but who the hell was she stabbing with the syringe?

“That’s it exactly,” Will affirmed, half-suspecting there was a creepy sick old aunt that Cami served as caretaker for, which would explain the needle in her pocket although the one in her collar was more suspicious, but this *looked* like the sick old aunt type of place -- his bones felt the presence like Miss Havishham’s moldy wedding cake as he and Chiyoh followed Cami inside and down a dark hall with peeling ivy green wallpaper, crinkles of gold foil all over the floor.

No one had touched this place with a feather duster or vacuum in years and Cami was acting like the place was not only normal, but also divine. “I hope you aren’t intimidated by my

house," she said rather grandly, showing them to a sitting room where Will raised an eyebrow at the dust-caked velvet chair, both he and Chiyoh opting to stand.

"It's been in my family for over a hundred years," she bragged in that uptight, nervous little voice of hers, like a deranged mouse. Will had noticed the ego and the nerves before, the mousy demeanor and impatient ambition, but not the deranged bit that stood out now like a great big fucking sewing needle in the back of a cozy bathrobe.

If he let her, she'd regale them with the history of the mansion and serve them some kind of appalling excuse for hor d'oeuvres and tea or wine, and Will suddenly knew the way he knew how to take breath into his lungs that Cami was the one to blame for *everything*.

He had the needle in his own hand and pressed to her carotid about a half-heartbeat later and Cami's eyes dilated suddenly with excitement instead of fear or surprise; her cupid's bow mouth layered in a chalky pink after-bath sugar scrub, formed a delighted "O"--

"You want me, well, you'll never get me, so give him back, Cami, and this can all be over," Will said, voice commanding and low.

Beside him, as he stared Cami down and Cami tried and failed to eat him up with her demanding "love me love me" eyes, he felt rather than saw Chiyoh take her gun out and hold it on Cami.

"Tell us where Hannibal is," she said, with a brimming rage in her own voice that smoldered and told Will Chiyoh shared his rage and worry.

"Why? So you can take me to jail." Cami pouted and then gasped when Will poked through the delicate skin beside her collarbone with a sudden jab from the needle, it was a knitting needle actually, he noticed, and there were knitted blankets and sweaters piled everywhere in the sitting room around them, there were candles that had burned down to the tables they sat on, leaving ugly chubby blobs of wax.

Plates of cheese, crackers and black licorice had been half-eaten and left out, in summer they would have been crawling with insects. Cami had apparently intended to treat herself to a spiced brandy punch, and had left the antique tumbler of liquor and the orange juice, the crooked cut citrus slices, scattered on the side table by the only decently clean item of furniture the room held: a small love-seat with a cushion, once white and now an ill shade of off-yellow, bearing an embroidered design of love birds. Beside the birds she had stitched in his name and hers, and "Cami Graham," with hearts and such, but Will hadn't needed to see that to know why this was happening and why she took Hannibal. It was in her eyes, he just hadn't cared enough to notice before. Most of his students were at least a little in love with him, and he was so wrapped up in Hannibal lately that he cared even less than usual.

"No," he whispered, getting right up in her face. "You overgrown toddler. So I can kill you mercifully instead of taking you apart slowly, in the *bad* way, Cami. Very bad. I kill people, Agent-in-Training Carmichael, and I'll kill you worse than anyone. You'll wish you were never born right before I tell you I'm not even halfway done torturing you, and I think we'll start with your nails since you ruined your ugly nail polish anyway."

“Will,” she frowned, sulking now, “This isn’t how I thought-- it’s not too late, I thought you would be impressed,” she said hopefully, staring into his dead eyes as the premature creases next to her young and pink mouth deepened. There was nothing in his eyes but her end. “To see what I’ve done and how I trapped him, made him pay for taking you away from me. I made him suffer so much for us, baby, so you’d know I’m serious, I’m sincere and I deserve--”

“I will get a wrench, Cami, and I will take your nails off before I sever your fingers and a long time before I cripple you because that will be closer to the end but not nearly close enough for you, trust me.” He smiled, cold, merciless, hating her more than anyone he had ever hated, and he wasn’t that nice of a guy. He hated a lot of people. He loved people and then he could be sweet, and he hated just as hard.

“Or.” He tapped her forehead with the needle and she tried to push his hand back. He smacked her hand, flipped it over and squeezed it too hard like a baby bird whose skeleton would soon crunch in his grip. “Or you tell me where you have Hannibal and help me get him out of here safely, and I will let Chiyoh shoot you in the head. Those are your choices. In your place, I would go for the swift exit. You were never meant to be the star of this show, Cami, and I know your type. I know. You have to be the lead or you wouldn’t even think it worth auditioning.”

“I’ll never tell you,” she shuddered. “I’d rather have you torture me to death because you’d be touching me at least. And in the meantime, he’ll die and never get you.”

“Is he here?” Will asked, gruff as he held her hand up higher, threatening.

Hannibal might be here, maybe in the attic or basement, or he might be at a remote location it would take longer to get to, and who knew how much time he had depending on whatever horrible situation Cami had left him in? He lost his patience when she met his demand with a sharp, grimacing smile of determination.

Will crushed her hand with a sickening noise that seemed to fill the room. Chiyoh did not waver in her defensive stance and grip on her raised gun; Cami processed what had just happened in a few shocked moments of silence and then she screamed in agony.

“No, Professor Graham, stop stop stop, please, I’m so sorry! Don’t--” She wept uncontrollably, whole small frail body shaking.

Pathetic, like all cowards. He had expected as much.

“You’d never be able to use that hand again, but that’s okay, because you won’t live to write me love letters from prison. Where’s Hannibal?”

Will loomed over her like the ghastly old manor house hovered over the modern brightness of the careless-chipper neighborhood, a promise deeper than she had ever seen or been offered, the sure knowledge of her imminent doom.

“B-b-basement,” she revealed, clutching the dead and crumpled hand to her chest as a mother cradles a baby, howling with pain as she rocked, curling in a ball on the one good couch,

“He’s in the basement, please don’t hurt me, I’ll go to jail, I’ll say what I did, I’ll do anything you want, Professor Graham, I’m so sorry.”

He ignored her sniveling nonsense and rushed for the basement while Chiyoh guarded the idiot amateur.

“Hannibal,” Will called desperately, running down the long stairs to the dark basement, feeling on the wall, then reaching up until he found the chain and pulled to turn on the bare bulb and could see his surroundings.

“Will,” Hannibal whispered, having roused slightly from where he was tightly bound to a thin old medical cot, wearing ragged, dirty scrubs. The light had caught his attention, but he was heavily sedated and by his complexion, both anemic and perilously dehydrated.

“There you are,” Will sighed gratefully and tears fell freely from his eyes as he ran to his lover, rapidly working free the bindings on his wrists and ankles, pressing frantic kisses to the places where skin had been rubbed away and replaced by angry red welts. Some of the wounds looked infected.

“Cami, that fucking bitch, I’m going to, oh God, *we’re* going to make her suffer, Hannibal, sweetheart, can you hear me?” He tried to help Hannibal sit up but the older man had passed out, mumbling incoherently in various languages, Will’s name and then a stream of jumbled words he could not even tell apart, much less try to translate.

“Hang on, honey, I’m here and you’re gonna be just fine. Let me check the IV’s, see what she--” Will guessed that whatever cocktail had him so out of it was in the line going to Hannibal’s forearm and eased the large needle out, bandaging the puncture with his scarf. The other IV bag had the job of keeping Hannibal alive with barest nutritional essentials, but it had dripped down to nothing, about twenty four hours earlier by Will’s quick estimation, and Hannibal, already half-starved, was now on death’s door, stomach looking concave with lack of sustenance, but the doctor’s heartbeat was much stronger under Will’s touch than anyone would expect.

“You need to…” Will sighed, palm warmly pressed to Hannibal’s cold, sweaty chest, trying to think how he could break through all the walls of pain and delirium to reach his man and get him back. “Love, I need you to come back to me, right now, okay? I need you *so* much.”

His voice trembled and he caressed Hannibal’s gaunt face where his beard had gone scraggly. “I was going to propose to you on our trip to Florence. I -- I bought you the most pretentiously perfect ring, it’s so over the top and gaudy and *us,* and I need you to wake up, honey, so I can put it on you and call you my fiance. Please?”

“All I know is this should be Bailey Park,” Hannibal mumbled, eyes fluttering open, rolling up and closing again. He couldn’t see Will; he probably just said “Will” about everything, or else a random quote, an old line from a Lithuanian folk tale his nanny used to tell before bed, he was somewhere entirely different from this basement.

“Bailey Park?” Chiyoh repeated, appearing in the basement, features etched in instant concern at Hannibal’s looks.

“It’s a line from a movie we watched with my family at Christmas,” Will explained hurriedly as she came to Hannibal’s other side and together they helped him up. “C’mon, honey, you can do it.”

“Cami?” he asked.

“She fainted from the pain.”

Will nodded. So, Cami thought having her hand shattered qualified as pain. She had a lot to learn.

Hannibal didn’t budge and he was still a big man, hard for Will and Chiyoh to carry between them to the basement stairs, slackness making him even heavier.

“Hannibal, I need --” a lightbulb flashed in Will’s head and he added, between the groans and gasps he and Chiyoh both emitted as they carried and dragged Hannibal forward as best they could.

“I need you to Become again, for me, for us. Be the animal you were after the men came,” Will begged him, “I know that it burns,”

Hannibal’s eyes opened but he didn’t seem to be conscious. He looked right at Will and blushed a faint pink, then said something to him in his native tongue before his head lolled around and dropped straight forward.

“What did he say?” Will grumbled, grabbing Hannibal’s ankles while Chiyoh used all her might to support her adoptive brother under the shoulders. Hannibal resembled a big, floppy rag doll.

“It’s Lithuanian,” Chiyoh grunted as they started the hard climb up the stairs with Hannibal between them, trust helping them synchronize their movements until they started to make real progress.

The stairs let them out into the kitchen, and they set Hannibal down in the breakfast nook built into the wall under a curtain of cobwebs.

“He said, ‘what’s it like, being perfect?’” Chiyoh wiped sweat from her brow with the back of her hand, leaning on the ancient-looking stove and sighing in exhaustion.

Will’s tear-stung eyes shone brighter at the memory.

“And then he said, ‘you’ll have to ask my lover. He’s perfect.’”

Will looked at Hannibal’s angelic features, his smooth handsomeness unaltered by the days of torture and imprisonment. He cupped his face and said urgently, “*Remember.* How you felt when they took her. You’d do anything to survive and make them pay. Even eat her, for she gave you the strength to take them all on. You made mincemeat of their villainy, you Became for her. Become for me now. Come back to me.”

Cami had roused and he heard her now, limping for the front door amidst a blur of pain in her hand and a panic attack. He turned from Hannibal and walked fast to Cami, grabbed her by the back of her neck and shoved her into the kitchen, where her flat, weak stomach collided into the sharp end of the counter. She screamed again, red-faced, “Please!”

“I should kill you right now and shut you up so I can think,” Will scowled, breathing hard, he needed the hard good savage thrill of revenge now, to handle the horror of his emotional pain over what Hannibal had gone through and all his own fear and sadness -- the terror that Hannibal might still succumb to any of his injuries. He needed a burst of vital strength. He could kill Cami now and get that, easily.

Chiyoh was pinning her hair up quickly, anticipating the need to help get Hannibal all the way across the large lawn to the car. She wasn’t a killer herself, but she wasn’t going to object to a murder they both knew he was always bound to commit. That would be pointless, and she was too smart for pointless. So she watched.

“Don’t kill her, Will,” Hannibal whispered, wide-eyed when Will and Chiyoh looked to him in surprise and Cami kept whimpering sobs into the dusty counter, coughing.

“But Hannibal,” Will reasoned, so relieved he was awake. He rushed to his lover’s side and held him, but Hannibal wasn’t even strong enough to pat his back in return.

“No. I know. But don’t, there’s a poison,” Hannibal managed to get out on a heavy tongue, his head already starting to loll again, consciousness forced through fog. “She has the...only antidote…” he fainted again.

Grim, Will rounded on Cami and got her before she could get the knife in the butcher block and kill herself to doom Hannibal and prevent Will from making her feel worse pain. She reached, but Will snapped her other wrist like a twig. “Where’s the antidote?”

She only whined and wheezed and threw up, mucus blubbers followed, mostly begging, useless.

“I’ll love you forever,” Will cooed finally, rolling his eyes behind her, holding her up in her stupid open robe and her thin, gauzy lingerie. “Sweet Cami, my angel, just tell me where that antidote is, okay, and it’ll all end. You can just go to sleep and never wake up again, how does that sound?”

“Wonderful,” she sighed, “It’s in my bedroom, third door from left. In the music box by the lamp on the--”

Chiyoh had already dashed upstairs by “music box” and returned seconds later with a slender, small vile of jewel-purple liquid.

“Does he ingest it or inject?” Will asked, soft and affectionate, smoothing out Cami’s ruffled bob haircut.

“You can just feed it to him, he only needs one dose. He would have been dead by morning without it, Professor. Thank you for taking mercy on me. I always knew you loved me, deep

down."

Will allowed Cami to keep mumbling her inane dreams as he practically tossed her to the floor where she landed in a confused swirl of brown terry and pale green chemise. Her two broken hands hit the floor first and she screeched, "What are you doing, Professor? Why--"

"Here now, love," Will smiled tenderly, making sure Hannibal swallowed the antidote. "We'll get you to the hospital soon and you can rest while I take care of you and the doctors give you everything you need to feel better."

"Not all raspberries are red," Hannibal announced, as if he believed this was the soundest reply to Will's sincere promises of recovery. That was okay. He was up, he was talking. The sense in his speech would come back in fits and starts, and Will would cherish every odd phrase till then.

"No, they're not, you're so right, handsome," Will grinned tearfully. He stroked Hannibal's face and said "Just a sec, okay?"

Striding back to Cami where she was splayed out on the floor under Chiyoh's watchful and repulsed gaze, he crouched beside her and said, "Are those your slippers, Cami? Just there, by the table?"

Baffled, she glanced at the pair of matching slippers that went with her robe and nodded. "Why? I don't…"

He grabbed the slippers and stuffed her feet into them unceremoniously. "I wouldn't want any of your extremities to get too cold and endanger your health while you're spending the day in the trunk of my car, thinking about what we have planned for you when we get time to deal with you. So, we needed something for your feet."

Will's tone was utterly casual and nonchalant. Cami was still gaping at him, complaining, "Professor! I said I was sorry, told you where Lecter was, even gave you the antidote - you're not being fair. You said you'd kill me quick."

He only laughed, even colder and meaner. "You wish. Just you wait, Cami."

"Noooo," she bleated uselessly, fighting while Will tied her up, but her fighting was nothing more than an exaggerated shuffle of what strength and mobility she had left. "Stop, please, I'm sorry--"

"I've never seen such an ugly pair of slippers in my life," Hannibal said out of nowhere, frankly and quite cogently.

He looked at Cami with pointed insult in his snobbish expression, every inch his normal, primly superior self for those moments.

By the time Will had finished laughing and looked over at his lover, Hannibal had fainted again; even Chiyoh chuckled softly.

"But," Cami argued, her face covered in spidery mascara runs.

Will shrugged, grabbed a dutch oven from the shelf by the stove and knocked her out with it.

Every heartbeat

Chapter Notes

> Hi friends! I'm running behind on my updates last and this week due to so much work irl 🤪. I hope you enjoy this very fluffy chapter!
>
> Now I'm off to work on updating "2 weeks". 🥰

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“He needs his blanket,” Will fretted in the hospital, unfolding Hannibal’s favorite fancy feathery-furry throw blanket carefully and arranging it with precision over his sleeping lover’s prone frame in the small bed.

Hannibal had been on supervised bedrest for a few days now, getting the fluids and monitoring he needed in order to get back to full strength. Cami had managed to get him dependent on a few drugs that had been flushed from his system, but then there were the withdrawal pains, for which poor Hannibal needed more pain meds, but milder ones that wouldn’t trigger the narcotic addiction. Will had been there every second when he hadn’t been consulting in the hall with doctors or telling every damn one that he had no intention of going home until his boyfriend was going home with him.

He got used to killing his already scarred and sensitive shoulder crammed onto the uncomfortable chair by Hannibal’s bed, staring at his lover’s sleeping face, handsome but worn out features shifting always from peaceful slumber to restless discomfort. In those half-awake flutters of pain and confusion, Hannibal’s hand always shot right out for Will’s. Hannibal trusted Will would be there to take his hand, and hell if Will was going to leave him hanging even once, just so he could sleep in a real bed or eat something that didn’t come from the hospital cafeteria. Actually, by Will’s standards the food wasn’t that bad at Baltimore General, but Hannibal wasn’t going to be too pleased when he saw the menu options ranging from bolognese tasting more like Will’s notorious cans of Chef Boyardee and the chicken noodle soup that he had to admit was faintly metallic tasting.

The coffee wasn’t much better, but Will sat down by the bed and took a sip of his latest big cardboard cup, ignoring the pangs of his own recent, desperate indulgence in cigarettes due to stress. Now that he was back with Hannibal and they were going to be okay, and Cami was going to be very slowly in many, many pieces and lamenting her past decisions, Will didn’t need a crutch of nicotine. Still, he was nearly as badly off as Hannibal by now, low on sleep, covered in aches, fiending for a cheap gas station pack of Marlboros.

Hannibal shifted again, letting out a soft, low sigh. Will was up again like a shot, lowering the blanket to his chest. “Now he’s hot,” he murmured attentively, feeling Hannibal’s brow, relieved it was warm but not hot or clammy.

“I know it would be pointless to suggest you stop doing that,” said Jack, who stood politely admiring the large collection of floral bouquets which Will had arranged on the side table.

“You’re a smart man, Jack.” Will smiled wryly, pleased when Hannibal settled back into a more solid, relaxed sleep. “If Bella was in this state…”

“I’d be doing the same damn thing.” Dressed in his nice grey suit with a plum shirt and complimentary tie with gold hues, Jack looked every inch the cogent and organized professional that Will hadn’t been in weeks.

As his boss lingered by an arrangement of peach and green carnations which Beverly, Jimmy and Brian had brought the day before (along with a much appreciated box of donuts and some of Hannibal’s essential things from home), Will caught a worried and distracted waft off his aura, the agent’s famous empathy prickling.

“That’s quite a blanket,” Jack noted, nodding in wan amusement at the gaudy throw with its large feathers in earth tone shades, and some kind of incredibly soft fur, alpaca perhaps.

“It’s a conversation starter,” Will smiled, nostalgic in remembering Hannibal’s pompous explanation of the blanket. “He called it a bargain at fifteen hundred dollars.”

“Fifteen hundred dollars for a *blanket*?” Jack’s brows shot up and he came over to the bed, lightly touching the fur, which Will had to admit felt like a fluffy, perfect cloud.

“Oh,” Jack allowed gamely, and Will nodded, chuckling into his next sip of coffee.

“Okay.” Will tossed Jack a knowing twitch of a smile and went to the flower table, lifting the lid on the huge donut box that was narrowly perched on the one far edge of the surface not covered in fragrant blossoms and “Get Well Soon” cards.

“What’s on your mind, Jack? You look like you’re afraid to tell me something you should be telling me.”

He picked a plain donut and plucked a small, soft corner off of it to slowly eat, as his appetite was still wildly on the fritz, his body reeling from an adrenaline crash. Jack gave him a sad smile, noticing how Will had borrowed an old Georgetown sweatshirt of Hannibal’s which hung loosely from his slim frame, falling a little past the waistband of his own well-worn grey sweatpants, slate blue Converse hastily stuffed on, socks forgotten. Will was clean-shaven in a nod of solidarity to his lover, since the nurse had to shave Hannibal’s beard off and trim his hair to fully assess the extent of his injuries. All in all, in this moment when he stood with his elbow on the window behind Hannibal’s bed, slowly pulling easy chunks of donut, his eyes hugely blue, cheeks smooth and bare, he looked like a boy.

This was entirely intended on Will’s part. Of course, he knew what was on Jack’s mind.

“Alana Bloom has been missing since the day you found Hannibal.” Jack watched Will carefully, no doubt noting his protege’s angelically innocent demeanor.

“What?” Will did one of his trademark “shocked and appalled” grimaces, laying it on a little thick with a hand to his heart, but it paid off. “Can we not catch one damn break? Any idea what happened?”

“She’s simply gone,” Jack said with a solemn wistfulness, waving his hands to indicate Alana dissipating into vapor. “No phone call, no note, no email or text. Her car is gone, her laptop is missing, her cloud’s been completely wiped -- we have forensics working on retrieving the lost files, but Agent Katz is not optimistic. Whoever erased those files knew what they were doing.”

“Could this have some connection to any of the work she was doing for you?” Will asked, brow knitted, voice lifting in a pitch-perfect tone of pained concern.

As predicted, Jack glared at him. Will put a hand out in defense -- “No, no, not that it’s your fault -- I just mean, you had her on the Vigilante case. What if the killer found out, found *her*?”

Jack sighed. “It tracks. But we always believed the Vigilante wasn’t driven by revenge, that his great passion was justice.”

Will set the donut aside on the windowsill as if he was simply too distraught over poor Dr. Bloom’s disappearance to eat another bite.

His big blue eyes went into full-on empathy Graham mode, which was a bit confusing when you were pretending to empathize with yourself, but doable, especially since he was so well-practiced at the trick. His voice, when he spoke again, was definitive, unquestionably serious.

“There are all kinds of justice, Jack.”

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By the time a very tired Jack ended his visit, he had reassigned the Vigilante case -- to Will. While the supervisor had been hesitant to burden Will with such a major task during Hannibal’s recovery, Will volunteered, explaining he had a lot of time on his hands, and while he couldn’t go into the field, he could certainly draw up a new profile.

That was fun. He cackled to himself numerous times, whisper-quoting some of his favorite lines from the profile to Hannibal as he composed, his own laptop propped on his plaid p.j. pants under the dim lamp light he left on so he could work.

“I wish to submit my definite conclusion that this so-called Vigilante never was one man, and that this supposed pattern of vigilante-style homicides has actually been a scattering of disparate and unrelated incidents, some of which were not even murders. In at least five of the deaths, animal attack and consumption was a strong suspicion during forensic analysis. The recent rise in anti-government, anti-law enforcement sentiment would account for the increase of vigilantism in cases where known criminals were found innocent by a court of law. The only quality that definitively links every single one of these cases into a chain we might pull to find the truth is that of their tragedy, the loss of life. Beyond that, this profile amounts to a pile of puzzle pieces, each from a different puzzle set.”

“I thought that part was especially good, huh, honey?” Will put his computer away and leaned over Hannibal, stroking his hear then pressing a soft kiss to his brow. “Did I tell you how it’s going with Cami, by the way?”

Cami wasn’t having a very nice time, hog-tied in the trunk of Will’s car, allowed out under strictly supervised bathroom trips, hiding her crumpled mess of formerly soft small hands under the sleeves of her robe. To any casual passer-by in the hospital, she looked like any other patient in a robe who appeared sickly, accounting for her limp, her skin so pale it looked almost like tracing paper, her quiet but resigned crying.

Will knew this was unsustainable for a lot of obvious reasons, one being that it was harder for Cami to unlock her stiff limbs to be able to walk each time he helped her out of the trunk. But to allow her a fast and easy death after what she had done was far more untenable. Hannibal, according to his doctors, was on the mend and healing steadily. They said Dr. Lecter should be up, about, and ready to go home by week’s end, and that only meant Will would have to continue this form of Cami’s imprisonment for three more days. He couldn’t leave the hospital as long as Hannibal was there, and Chiyoh shouldn’t be burdened with having to look after another prisoner, when she had so recently been extricated from years of the same back at Castle Lecter. Will was glad she was free from that heavy obligation, and wanted her to stay that way. He supposed that in a way, Chiyoh seemed a sister to him, too, bonded by the storm they had weathered together for Hannibal’s rescue.

Chiyoh’s lack of patience for his “immature” side and the dismissive way she treated most of his overtures towards friendship or family connection only made her seem more like his sibling.

Cami quickly learned how to use what remained of her hands to avail herself of the bathroom, which had bars on the windows to protect patients who tried to flee treatment they needed. And she even cleaned herself up as best she could in the sink, appreciated by Will, who had a sensitive sense of smell, if not quite so hyper aware as Hannibal. She only smelled a little funny, faint body odor under the cheap bathroom soap which wasn’t at all up to the job of masking an ordeal best described as *trunk sweat.*

By the second night that Will patiently brought her back to the trunk, having clearly indicated he would snap her neck if she attempted to get help, and he *would,* and he was fast and good, and would get away with it, Cami had stopped her whimpering pleas for mercy.

The hospital’s massive garage had this particularly convenient area which no one really used; it was too far from the main wings to be a sensible walk, and only existed in case there was ever a large-scale emergency necessitating some extra parking.

“I’m proud of you, Cami,” Will said with a haunting smirk as he hovered above the trunk where she had curled up on her side for a long night of unrestful terror. “You’ve become a quick study, far more so than you ever were in my lecture.”

He shut the trunk, swung his keys and walked back towards the elevators with a skip in his step.

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To Jack and any other uninformed observer, Will formed the perfect image of an overwrought, exhausted, worried boyfriend. Since to their knowledge he had no reason to target his fellow profiler, it would probably never occur to the FBI to suspect him in Alana's disappearance. Jack had broken the news to him gently, hoping that yet another piece of "bad news" would not be the last straw that sent Will into panic mode again.

Little did Jack know, Will had already taken care of the bad news, Dr. Bloom herself, and swept under the figurative rug her silly little "profile" on him. It had turned out to be eye-rollingly simplistic and off-base on several of his most notable characteristics, when Will took the time to peruse the file saved to the harddrive of Alana's laptop.

As for time, he certainly had plenty of it, waiting for Hannibal to come back to him from wherever he was inside his memory palace. When he wasn't tending to any possible need his ailing lover might have, Will could easily spend an hour reading a psychological profile of himself, trying to edge out the remaining bitter edge of his jealousy and hate towards Alana with darkly satisfying amusement at her expense.

After having a good, cold laugh at her pathetic determinations on him, including her certainty that the Vigilante would only ever kill truly evil people who would otherwise evade justice, Will had deleted the file and the rest of Alana's documents saved to the cloud, right before handing the computer off to Chiyoh, who would take it somewhere and smash it. Hannibal's adoptive sister was also eager to go to Alana's apartment one evening and scour it for any further evidence of her suspicion of Will.

There was nothing; Alana had composed the profile and gone to Will to warn him she must turn it in to Jack, and since she assumed he regarded her with respectful esteem, and moreover if he was the vigilante he would never harm an innocent -- she thought she was doing the ethically sound thing -- her next stop would have been Jack's office at Quantico. She had not apparently saved any notes or compiled evidence at home or her own office at Georgetown; probably concerned to preserve quiet delicacy on the matter given Hannibal's kidnapping, she had been foolishly polite about the whole thing.

Will had thanked Chiyoh for her assistance in the cover-up, only to earn himself a withering stare from the raven-haired beauty. "I did not help you bring my brother back from such an ordeal so that he could lose you shortly after to an arrest for murder. I did this for Hannibal because he needs you, now more than ever."

Will opened his mouth to offer a sincere "point-taken" style apology, but Chiyoh cut him off, brushing past him on her way out the door of Hannibal's room while her brother slept through yet another secretive and dangerous exchange.

"Childish," she murmured, shaking her head and slipping out into the hall like the shadow of a dream.

***

When Hannibal finally roused, it was to find himself alone in the dark with Will, and it felt like rebirth; it felt right.

“Will,” he said, forgetting at first how to make the sound come out. His boy, sleeping with his angelic face crushed against Hannibal’s own thigh over a thin sheet, did not stir, so Hannibal lifted a limp hand and let it drop as gently as possible onto Will’s back, massaging with awkward but sincere tenderness.

“Will,” he said again, grinning with a flash of fangs in the shadows to find himself successful this time: the beautiful profiler woke with a start, sitting up to reveal a charming pink blotch on his flawless face where he had snuggled into Hannibal.

Will’s curls were a gorgeous disaster, his eyes wildly searching for assurance his lover’s health was truly mending. The younger man half-stood to lean over him, cupping Hannibal’s newly smooth-shaven face and sighing, “Hannibal,” the name drawn out, drawled into music, sweeter than ever. “You okay? I mean, how could you be? Are you -- better? I’m so sorry, this is all--”

“Will,” Hannibal repeated with a besotted smile, his eyes warm and widening at Will’s distress.

He felt the tickling, smooth warmth of his own red cashmere sweater, which Will was wearing so that the sleeves, baggy around the boy’s wrists, brushed his cheeks. Nuzzling into the sensation, he found the darling heat and smoothness of Will’s wrists and pressed a weak kiss to his pulse before inhaling deeply, noticing the mingled scent of hospital hand sanitizer and the cologne which Hannibal had gifted him on Thanksgiving morning.

Everything was so terribly simple now. Will didn’t see that yet: Hannibal would have to explain.

He said his love’s name again, his originally slurring pronunciation improving to nearly his normal extent of smoothness. But Will wasn’t listening; he kept feeling Hannibal’s forehead and kissing his cheeks and apologizing,

“Hannibal,” his boy’s voice gruff and soft and everything Hannibal had missed and missed and dreamed about for what seemed like years. “if I had just paid enough attention, I would have noticed what was off about Cami, but I was so--”

More kisses, petal-soft and fire-hot, fast and desperately adoring, fell from Will’s lips to Hannibal’s face, sending shivers of happiness through Hannibal’s body. “I was too vain to even *conceive* I might have missed such a vital detail in my everyday life -- I don’t know what’s wrong with me, I can only promise to do better--”

Hannibal’s brow furrowed and he stroked his hand through Will’s curls, shaking his head. How could his dear one try to take the blame for what his disturbed student had done? It was more than evident Will did not think he had come to the rescue speedily enough, nor done enough to help him recover; he was immersed in suffocating waves of impossible perfectionism.

Finally, as it became clear Will was wrapped up in anxiety and could not stop his repetitious checking on Hannibal’s vitals, lifting a cup of water with a straw to his lips, gesturing around the room giving abrupt updates on recent events, apologizing, kissing. Hannibal rolled his

eyes and stuck his hand under the red sweater, quickly finding the number one most sensitive spot on Will's belly. He gave one firm tickle, and when Will startled, slapped his other hand affectionately over Will's open mouth.

"No," Hannibal chided, eyes sparkling with amusement and deeper intention. "I'm not merely trying to say your name, my dearest. Can you let me finish?"

Will nodded mutely, baffled.

"*Will* you marry me?" Hannibal asked, removing his hand from Will's lips as the profiler's jaw dropped.

"Of course I will," he whispered, climbing on the bed and laying over Hannibal lightly, knees to the bed so his full weight wouldn't be on top of his now-fiance. Hannibal smirked, never having quite looked so much like his *Hannibal*, and gripped Will's hips with what strength he had, immediately pressing Will onto him fully.

They kissed, slowly, Will so tentative that Hannibal growled and corrected him with a flick of his tongue across the seam of his lips and a squeeze of his ass that meant business.

"Jesus," Will laughed into the next wetter, hotter kiss, Hannibal slapping his ass and squeezing again, "You do realize you're in a hospital?"

"I don't care where I am as long as you're here," Hannibal hummed carelessly, "Wanting to be mine forever. My husband." He leaned up and gave Will's cute ear a devilish nip before licking it, eliciting a gasp from the boy. "Mine."

"Uh huh," Will murmured, "Daddy, you can't just-- c'mon now," he giggled, inevitably aroused as Hannibal insistently felt him up under his shirt, tweaking his nipples and groping his behind with yet more rough kisses to his open mouth, yet more growls of impatience. "We're gonna get--"

The door swung open, causing the automatic overhead lights to pop on, shedding brilliant fluorescent focus on the sultry scene, Will straddling Hannibal while the older man had one hand under his sweater, obviously planted to his pec, and the other in the process of sliding right down the back of his dog print pajama pants.

"Agent Graham," said the night nurse, Cindy, in alarm. "Please detach immediately. I'll avert my eyes for a moment."

"Sorry," Will winced, climbing off Hannibal, although his lover tried to prevent this, grabbing at him until Will's apologetic expression melted into more laughter. He swatted Hannibal's hands and told Cindy it was "safe" to turn around.

"Well then, Dr. Lecter," Cindy huffed, still pink in her plump face up to the roots of her white pixie cut. She checked his vitals and nodded in approval. "Glad to see you getting your strength back. I suspect you will still be a tad woozy in the next few hours as you acclimate to the conscious world. To which I welcome you back." She winked, her polite language prompting a courteous nod of thanks from her patient, who was still distracted, staring at

Will, who still sat in the chair by the bedside, shaking in silent laughter with his hands over his mouth.

“Now that you are feeling so very energetic, I advise you not to spend all of that wonderful strength on any frivolous and also deeply not allowed in the hospital activities. If Agent Graham can restrain himself from pouncing on you again, I do believe you will be well enough to be discharged by tomorrow afternoon.” Cindy winked at Hannibal, who now surrendered to his own chortle as Will complained, “Hey, he’s the one who started it,” to which the older man merely shrugged with a well-practiced and convincing innocent smile.

Cindy replaced her stethoscope around her neck and made a few notes on Hannibal’s file. “I’m going to tell Dr. Bisset you’re up and at ‘em, Dr. Lecter.” She opened the door and stuck the clipboard with his file in the shelf attached to the entrance. Pointing at the ardent couple, she repeated her warning, “No more funny business, you two.” And made it out into the hall before they both heard her snorting with laughter of her own.

“You hear that? Now behave,” Will scolded, gently tugging Hannibal’s sleep-mussed hair. “I was gonna propose to you, too, you know.”

“In Florence,” Hannibal said, a strangely distant look coming into his eyes. “I remember you telling me -- as if in a dream…”

“I think I blabbed it to you in a cascade of endearments when we first rescued you at the Carmichael house,” Will admitted. He pulled his chair close to the bed and sat down, getting tired again now that the surprise of his lover’s awakening had begun to subside into pure joy.

He pressed a kiss to the back of Hannibal’s big, strong, wonderful hand, and the older man nodded. “I think you helped me to rouse from my drug-induced stupor that first time,” he recalled, “I was lost between the pages of my memories, deep inside a stubborn denial, willing numbness to defeat my fear of losing you. But you told me to fight, in so many words.”

“Sounds like me,” Will bragged, lifting his eyebrows while a roguish smile spread his lips. He traced the veins on the back of Hannibal’s hand, frowning at a fading puncture mark where an earlier iv had been inserted on the day they arrived at Baltimore General. “I’m going to take such good care of you.”

Hannibal squeezed Will’s hand and nodded, understanding not to insist it wasn’t necessary; he must submit to Will’s attentive care, as if he would ever be able to resist or deny his boy any indulgence. He would have been quite fine without any unusual amount of soothing caresses, or the bubble baths, massages and careful monitoring of his meals and sleep which was certainly going to take up much of his next few days, but he was with Will now. Since then, since Autumn and their eyes meeting in Jack’s office with an instant spark of chemistry, and Will’s boyish upper hand, and the heady rush of their romance that seemed to ease the woe of his past trauma like the cooling spread of a healing salve that did not erase, but understood and loved, since then. Hannibal was far better than the “quite fine” which used to meet his daily approval from behind his person suit: he was *happy.*

“Would you have said yes? In Florence?” Will asked.

“I would. Of course, it would be somewhat repetitive of me, as I would have already proposed to you on New Year’s Eve, but I would not wish to ruin your own planned proposal for the world.”

“Good,” Will grinned, blushing. “I hope you know I want you to give me the whole set up of your proposal plan for New Years. Whatever the theme and speech, I still want it. It’s mine. Nobody can take that away, anymore than they can separate us.”

“They never will, mylimasis, although they may try. To their subsequent and excruciating regret.” Hannibal watched intently as Will mouthed, “she’s in the trunk,” with a wink promising a delightful time to come when they could treat Cami Carmichael to a slow and miserable death, disassembling her and eating her with lazy contentment in her miserable, too-gradual demise.

Perhaps she should have found her own lover, Hannibal reasoned smugly, instead of attempting to steal someone else’s.

“It’s just too bad Cami Carmichael got away,” Will sighed like the Oscar-worthy hero he was. “I wish I could make her pay for hurting you, Hannibal.”

“Hush, love,” Hannibal smiled, eyes glittering in proud entertainment at Will’s shenanigans, “She won’t make it far. If you informed Agent Crawford of the details, I’m sure the federal government and Freddie Lounds will collaborate to ensure she can never escape notice.”

“She told me she’d rather die than rot in prison.” Will pressed his lips together at the arch of Hannibal’s pale brow and the slight crease of his elegant smile. “Suicide is a cowardly enough escape that I believe it’s most likely how Jack’s team will find her. But I’ll be with you, honey. Not leaving your side anytime soon now I got you back.”

He was so...not only possessive, but fixated on Hannibal’s safety and health; the older man felt a fleeting note of caution, suspecting Will had suffered so deeply during his abduction that he had developed an increased obsession with protecting his lover. It would be best for him to humor Will for several days at least, before the need would naturally arise to gently make it clear he was back to full health and needn’t be coddled as an ailing patient.

Rather than mentioning any of this, Hannibal reflected on the poetry that had been running through his most recent dream.

In it, he and Will had sat under a pink blossom tree on a languidly sunny spring afternoon, in their own backyard. This was a very particular tree, a Japanese Flowering Apricot which Hannibal had planted several years ago but never grew in properly due to an early chill in the late summer weather. Ever since, he had always wanted to plant a new one and do it properly, so that the air would fill with fluttering swirls of the pink petals by March, when the trunk and branches would have grown strong, bursting with double-rose blooms that scented the yard in a spicy-clean fragrance.

In his dream, Will lay under the tree and under a soft blanket, his head on Hannibal’s lap while the older man wrote poetry about him in his journal.

"What does it say?" Dream-Will had asked in that naughty, curious way of his that earned his curls a swift tug while Dream-Hannibal's eyes remained fixed sternly on his writing.

"*"Hey,*" Dream-Will pouted, turning his pretty face to bite Dream-Hannibal's thigh through the dark-wash jeans he had worn on some of their dates to places from "Will's world" where formal attire would be inappropriate. "*C'mon, spill. Inquiring minds want to know.*"

"*It's a secret,"* Hannibal whispered now in the hospital room, and Will looked at him confused. "Something from one of my dreams," the doctor elaborated, "A dream in which we were dreaming. I was writing you a poem, although I never write verse in reality. My confidence in grasping the English tongue usually does not quite extend to such loftily academic heights,"

"Doesn't it?" Will chuckled, rubbing one sleepy eye and taking a sip from his own water cup. He clicked the light switch by the bed and the lights went dimmer. The coast was clear and it seemed likely Dr. Bisset would check on Hannibal in the morning at soonest. So the profiler climbed onto Hannibal's bed again and slipped under the blanket with him.

Hannibal lay flat on his back and Will lay on his side, nestling his face into Hannibal's chest in the plain long sleeved tee and sweatpants which the doctors had said it was okay for him to wear rather than the embarrassing polka dotted paper gown in which Will would never want him to wake. Will breathed Hannibal in, no cologne now but the natural warmth of his body embracing him, so alive. So okay. He needed to believe this was real. Losing Hannibal, or believing he might have, had shattered him, and he wasn't sure all the pieces were back in place yet.

"I was dissatisfied with all the poetry I wrote in my teenage years," Hannibal elaborated with a quiet yawn as Will giggled at the admission. "More so, perhaps, by the drab and compulsory verse I composed while in medical school. I laid that hobby aside in favor of the theremin soon after. Yet, the Hannibal Lecter in this dream wrote a poem which, while simplistic and slightly cliched, was not a total waste of ink."

"Do you remember it?" Will asked, voice half-muffled against Hannibal's chest. He slung his calf over Hannibal's and placed his palm on the older man's heart, but did not cling as he used to. Hannibal wanted Will to hold on so tight that it hurt, but he knew Will would shudder at any suggestion of this until he was completely recovered. This polite embrace was a tease to Hannibal, the delicacy unsustainable, but he tried to be patient.

"'*Every heartbeat bears your name*,'" Hannibal repeated slowly, closing his eyes to summon the image from the dream, the pink flowers, the quiet barking of the dogs playing in the yard, the random live performance of Bach on an unoccupied piano sat on the back patio (completely normal-seeming by his dream-logic at the time), and his neat cursive lines of verse. He stroked Will's hair as he had then, continuing, "*Loud and clear they state my claim. Ask anyone and they'll tell you it's true…*"

"That every heartbeat belongs to you," Will sang under his breath, cuddling Hannibal and kissing his cheek, rubbing his shoulder and wrist where Cami had strapped him down.

The older man paused his recitation and looked at Will in bewilderment.

“That’s not a poem,” Will smiled, kissing the tip of his nose, slipping his fingers under his shirt and massaging his belly gently, although every small touch still made Hannibal tremble distractedly and look at Will as a drowning man regards the only life preserver bobbing on stormy waves. “It’s a song we heard my parents sing at karaoke. Remember -- the night we met up with Charlie and Nadine, too?”

Hannibal frowned, perplexedly seeking the specific memory under the same troubled waves. “Was that the evening you convinced me to partake of the ‘potato skins’ and ‘southwestern egg rolls’?”

“Yes, honey, that was the night. We had kamikaze shots and sang ‘Human’ by Human League -- but you sipped your shot,” Will laughed, nudging Hannibal, who gave him a stubbornly elegant nod.

“I prefer to savor my cocktails.”

“Yeah but it wasn’t a cocktail, it was a shot. You’re supposed to --” Will bit his lip when Hannibal’s fingers brushed against his own smooth face, where he used to be bearded and now felt more sensitive than usual. “Mmm,” he sighed. “Anyway, do it your own way. Don’t ever change.”

”My sexy Ripper,” Will mouthed, and Hannibal blushed, breaking eye contact to look down at his free hand toying nervously with the blanket.

Whatever it was in Will that had, from the first moment they saw each other, made him long to dominate Hannibal, unravel his smooth and debonair exterior and cause him to moan and cry in helpless pleasure, that same instinct roiled through him stronger than ever. He wanted it again, to roughly tug Hannibal’s pants down, flip him over right here and--

He closed his eyes and took a few breaths to try and ease his growing arousal. “When you look at me like that,” he laughed in a conflicted, vulnerable way, honestly. “Oh, Daddy, you are trouble and you know it, don’t you?”

Southern sweetness had snuck back into Will’s rumbling tone, and Hannibal gave him a smile full of the same regret he was too tired to do what had them both hot and bothered.

“Will, do you think...would you sing the rest of it to me?” Hannibal asked softly, sifting his hand through Will’s curls rhythmically while his lover nodded, face warm against his chest.

He closed his eyes as Hannibal did the same, both of them immediately weak to drowsiness. “*Every heartbeat bears your name, Loud and clear, they stake my claim / My red blood runs true blue / And every heartbeat belongs to you…*”

Chapter End Notes

Next time: Hannibal wants his dom!Will back, desperately, but Will is afraid to hurt him as he's still recovering from the kidnapping. However can they work it out? 🤔 And later, a surprise visit and some fun murder hubby drama!

Your hands are in my hair but my heart is in your teeth

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"*Hann*ibal," Will said coyly, looking up from under his dark, devastatingly long lashes, his motor oil-streaked hands still wrapped around the latest boat engine he was repairing out in the garage. He smiled, pillowy lips curved in subtle flirtatious surprise, and tucked an errant, work sweat-glossed curl behind his adorable elven ear. "Is there something you wanted to tell me?"

When Hannibal had entered the cavernous garage which had once played host only to the Bentley and the odd spare power tool in his murderous arsenal, he noted again how Will had put down roots here, adding a work table and his organized chaos of ongoing repair products, his tools spread by size and category over the table.

That was reassuring, since some strange twinge in Hannibal's heart still half-expected Will to change his mind about them any day now. Will wasn't going anywhere, the scene reminded him -- as if his boy had not reiterated in no uncertain terms, on multiple and very heated occasions, that Hannibal could not get away from the profiler's demanding, possessive love, even if he wanted to.

His cinnamon gaze was then immediately diverted from the momentary tangent of time, place and meaning, darting directly to the small swath of firm stomach revealed by the stretch of Will's well-muscled arms over his head. At the sound of his approach, expensive loafers padding quietly but unmistakably nearer, Will had merely stretched, glancing at the clock mounted on the wall by his table.

"Is it lunch time already?" he asked casually, looking briefly at Hannibal with a grin of greeting, before he leaned back over his work, twisting a wrench on the motor and placing a screwdriver between his lips as an expediency, for that was the next item he planned to use.

A few seconds later, Will fully registered what he had seen when he glanced over at his elegant fiance. The screwdriver fell from his lips and his gorgeous face blushed a beguiling pink. A hard look of discipline flashed in sapphire eyes, but his smile was so teasing, Hannibal suddenly felt his own skin was on fire, from head to toe.

He was feeling, especially for Dr. Hannibal Lecter, a clearly minimal but certainly poignant burst of -- *self-consciousness*. He blushed as well, perhaps the sensation having something to do with his attire: a black mesh t-shirt which was quite see-through, and a pair of mesh micro shorts in black and gold which left little to the imagination (especially regarding the hard bulge in the front of the shorts).

The thin screwdriver fell from Will's lips and clattered to the table. "Something...ahem, on your mind?"

"No," Hannibal smiled brightly, casual as could be despite the pounding of his heart.

This, after all, was a plan -- painstakingly conceived and to be carried off as he had designed, lest he fail in the endeavor and have no one else to blame but his own vulnerable confusion.

If he could not convince Will to dominate him soon, he believed he would perish of sexual frustration. This was a *real* danger, unlike the by now minimal and fading injuries from his ordeal at Cami's hands. Will fretted over him every day, cursing under his breath with self-blaming despair at the network of scratches and bruises that still covered much of Hannibal's body.

And every day Will insisted on doing all of the household chores and cooking, extending his break from the FBI to accommodate the labor which Hannibal could have done in his sleep at this juncture -- and treating his lover to every indulgence of massage, bathing, poetry reading, hand-feeding, sweet, lingering kisses that healed more than the strongest of the pain medicines he was allowed to take until fully recovered --

Hannibal was awash in a land of love and affection from Will where he was the center of his love's attention almost constantly. He had all the joy and fulfillment from such a paradise of a time, doted on and cherished, making it hard for him to summon with his usual strength any resistance to those beautiful healing hands, the florid words of tenderness flowing from Will's lips, the promises to make Cami pay which had already come to gruesome fruition, and at the end of each day, before he went to sleep "by ten, so you get enough rest," Will would make long, deep, but agonizingly *gentle* love to Hannibal.

In short, Hannibal had everything he had wanted in the week since returning from the hospital, *except* the one treat he liked better than anything else, and therefore it had become the only topic he could seem to think about, replaying the memories of their most scandalous encounters with Will in charge and punishing him to exquisite heights of pleasured pain.

He had begged Will several times already to stop handling him with kid gloves, hold him down and fuck him until he saw stars, spank him until he couldn't sit for a week, choke him, slap his face, make him suffer delightedly by ramming his big, perfect cock all the way down his throat, pull his hair and tell him he'd been naughty before coming all over his face with a wanton growl, throw him over every piece of furniture in the house and grip his hips and thighs till it left new bruises, leave hickies all over his neck that a teenager would be embarrassed by, scratch his back and *claim what was his.*

Hannibal loved being taken care of by his boy, but Will was being paranoid, self-guilting and ridiculously hesitant about hurting him, reigniting any of the wounds from his kidnapping and capture. He was so worried about triggering Hannibal's post-traumatic stress that he never stopped to *listen* when the older man begged him and ordered him and demanded and whined and sulked for *what he really wanted and needed.* That Will, the commanding and terrifying, pretty and ruthless dom, belonged to Hannibal alone -- and he wanted what was *his*.

The trick remained to bring it out of Will. Earlier that day, they finally finished skinning Cami alive, and this process with all of its breathtakingly beautiful carnage, spiked deliciously with well-deserved revenge, had brought them closer to their full Becoming as one than they had been since New Year's. The way they stared at each other every time they glanced up from their brutal handiwork, how Will licked his bloody lips slowly and smirked

at Hannibal as the last of Cami's pathetic bleating cries cut off into the silence of death, best of all Hannibal pressing his large and knowing hand over Will's elegant and calloused one, gripped around Cami's heart while the foolish girl's central organ pounded out its last few beats.

In the darkly intoxicating thrill of this moment, Will moaned while Hannibal showed him how to twist her heart in the right places to pull it out of her chest cavity and into the open between them, blood-soaked and oozing more bloody drops between their joined hands as the heat in their eyes pushed them forward, kissing relentlessly while sharing licks and bites of the heart's invigorating pulp. Hannibal knew how much they could eat without becoming ill, and he had to stop Will when his boy became so animalistic he might have gobbled his enemy's heart down to nothing, and how he wished Will would go on gnawing at his hand, lick and suck the blood from Hannibal's fingers and flip him around, shove him across the kitchen table which had become an operating table for the grisly procedure, yank his lover's trousers down and show him just how ruthless he could be.

No such luck. Alas, Will let out a breathy laugh of disbelief and almost calmly obeyed Hannibal's silent decree they should stop eating the heart. He had the audacity, instead of ripping Hannibal's clothes off, to inquire if he should go to the store to purchase more ice for storing Cami's organs which they had carefully preserved for future recipes. Hannibal almost screamed.

He had had enough of this softness, this coddling. So he was eminently pleased when the package he had ordered from a luxurious online men's lingerie boutique happened to arrive after they showered, while Will took the dogs for a walk.

Excitedly, like a child on Christmas morning, Hannibal hid the saucy attire and waited for his moment. After taking a nap together, Will said he was going to work on his boat refurbishing, which he seemed to find a pleasant way to spend his time while listening to classic rock on the "boombox" he had brought from his little house in Wolf Trap and insisted "still worked fine." Hannibal was grateful there was at least one hobby other than caring for the dogs which *sometimes* gave him sufficient alone time to scheme properly.

Playfully, he had tugged at Will's white t-shirt and soft blue flannel and squeezed his supple ass through those damnably well-fitted and highly distracted faded jeans. And he had asked Will if he could please have the privilege of making lunch that afternoon.

"Well, okay," Will relented, rolling his eyes at Hannibal's pout. "I've said no to too many other requests lately, and I'm going to earn myself a guilt complex if I have to disappoint you one more time, Daddy. Please, just don't overextend yourself?"

"I promise," Hannibal said solemnly, resting a hand over his heart and making his lover chuckle again. "I will bring you a plate once it's ready. You'll be hungry by the time the roast is done braising, and then it will be just the thing for a hard-working boy."

"I don't like to be idle," Will admitted, dropping his eyes, toying absent-mindedly with the sleeve of Hannibal's velvety green robe. He glanced automatically at the low v in the front of the robe, the strong pectorals and silver hairs barely revealed.

Hannibal nodded thoughtfully, not keen to put more pressure on Will to disclose his feelings regarding *certain energies which he had allowed to become pent up over time*. Actually, he was quite keen to interrogate Will within an inch of his life in his usual, sly style of psychoanalysis, but Will was too smart for his tricks, and in no mood. He was just as on edge as Hannibal, shaken to the core by almost losing his lover, making himself suffer masochistically under the auspices of protecting the older man's delicate state of health.

The only thing delicate about Hannibal was his strained patience to have Will exactly the way he wanted him, and now, finally, this afternoon seemed to bring the result he wanted. He hoped…

"You...don't have anything in particular you felt like telling me?" Will repeated for a third time, out of his depths.

"Only that I considered your fondness for the au jus sandwich at Ophelia's, and used the crusty french bread from last night's stew to create a similar adaptation of the roast--"

Proudly, Hannibal put the neat little tray of food down on the edge of Will's work table and waited, glowing with anticipation, for the consequences of his clothing choice (or lack thereof).

Will rubbed his chin, which was stubbled again now, although Hannibal had gone on shaving, mainly since his fiance liked to carefully check his face for the marks left by Cami's rough treatment and dry skin from the terrible confinement. He had missed the rough scrape of his boy's sharply handsome jawline dragging over his thighs and ass…Hannibal moaned under his breath as his erection hardened further, the increasing bulge pornographically apparent under the lace-like mesh. He could feel the cool air from outside which barely slipped under the garage door, enough to make him even more stimulated and sensitive as the breeze blew over his hard nipples and cock.

"You're talking about a recipe?" Will blushed harder, fisting and unfisting his hands by his sides. He had to break, any minute now.

Hannibal smiled, nervous and exhilarated, automatically intimidated by Will's classic yet deadly beauty, how the younger man's oil-streaked shirt was sealed tight to his scrumptious upper body with the exertion of his work, how Will's rebellious curls spilled over his furrowed brow, more angelic than Botticelli's finest representations thereto.

"Hannibal, what the hell are you *wearing?*" Will slung down the wrench he'd forgotten he still had in one clutching fist, causing an accusing clang, and bore down on his lover, although even then his demeanor was still frustratingly restrained. "You're trying to tell me you came in here looking *that* unbelievably sexy, all wrapped up like a naughty present, throwing your beautiful fucking body in my goddamn face when you *know* how I get and you *know* I've been trying not to."

"I do know." Hannibal arranged the already perfectly neat array of items on the lunch tray, unable to hear his own voice above a muffled blur, due to the pounding of his heart. "I like to look nice for you, my dear. I did not, of course, wish to seem presumptuous." He gulped,

nervous again, and added, while he turned the small vase containing a black rose in a half-circle to make it exactly aligned with the low glass of Will's favorite whiskey.

"I think you'll find that despite all appearances to the contrary, Miss Carmichael has made for a sumptuous and juicy roast," he blathered, turning redder when Will got close again and grabbed him right by the collar of his thin, gauzy shirt.

Yes-Yes-Yes-- The frustrated, burning glare Will gave him while he gathered the flimsily lush fabric in his tightening fist could have made Hannibal come on the spot, were he not determined to save his release for when he received his boy's permission--

"You and this slutty little outfit," Will accused with fiery passion, backing Hannibal against the nearest wall and getting right up in his face. "Messing with my restraint when you know how difficult it is for me to--"

The fabric of Hannibal's shorts was extremely comfortable, soft as buttery silk, shining with a subtle gold glitter, with a certain teasing effect caused -- the light would shift just so over his cock and balls, and Will seemed to remember he was nearly naked. Hannibal watched the flow of Will's ocean gaze enveloping him head to toe again.

"Yes," he admitted, remaining perfectly submissive, just the begging in his big brown eyes to weaken Will's resolve to be sweet to him and sweet only.

"This -- was your little plan, huh, Daddy?" Will's breath poured hotly over Hannibal's face and he sealed his body tightly against Hannibal's, pinning the Ripper's wrists easily above his head. "To break me down until I get rough with you?"

"I admit as much," Hannibal murmured, having gone delightedly pliant in Will's iron grip.

The younger man's hold on him did indeed press against a few still-healing wounds, but in the most wonderful way. He was a masochist in the purest sense, and nothing gentle from Will could ever be enough. To be ignited by the profiler's smoldering lust was his only desire, always. It was the first time in his life Hannibal had ever longed to be consumed.

"You've been very bad," Will warned gruffly. "You've broken my rules, defied me, tempted me, then tried to play it off demurely. That was dishonest. Don't bother pretending you're sorry. Now...do you think you deserve a spanking?"

"Yes," Hannibal nodded, "I confess I've been dreadfully disobedient, baby. Selfish, too. I deserve the most thorough punishment you might devise."

"*Deserve* is such a funny word, don't you think, when it comes down to it?" Will raised his eyebrows teasingly, and there was an evil glittering sheen in his eyes Hannibal recognized from past adventures. In this context, he did not like it one bit. Will was feeling sadistic in the most petty, vengeful way. It did not bode well for Hannibal's hopes.

"Subjective, really, what anyone deserves." Will stared at Hannibal's baffled face. "Don't try to come up with excuses now, what's done is done. You don't deserve a spanking, those are for when Daddy has been good. I'll show you what you have *earned*. How's that?"

“I will accept whatever you--”

“Damn right you will.” Will hissed the words in his face, his eyes intense with equal parts lust and anger. His body was tensed, ready to pounce. He let go of Hannibal’s wrists, stepped back and ordered, “Go bend over the car. Now.”

Hannibal went on shaky legs, about to faint from excited anticipation. This was much better than the outcome he suspected from Will’s initial reaction -- he thought he would be sent away without any special attention, to think about what he had done.

Perhaps Will would issue some modified discipline such as would not hurt him too much, but would serve to tide him over until he was fully healed? Even a foray into humiliation would be fine with Hannibal - being ordered to remain dressed in his skimpy underthings in presenting position for hours without a single touch from Will...his excitement was mounting with every new theory.

“Look at you,” Will breathed against Hannibal’s ear when he approached after a few suspended moments had elapsed with Hannibal waiting, doing his best not to smile while he leaned over the Bentley’s trunk and stuck his ass out accordingly.

Will wrapped an arm around Hannibal’s waist and kissed his earlobe softly, then his jaw. He ran tender, slow fingers through Hannibal’s hair and murmured, “You’re the most beautiful man I’ve ever seen in my life. You’re so sexy, Daddy. You know that?”

Confused, torn between bliss at the praise that normally sent him towards sub space and disappointment at Will’s sweet, gentle approach, Hannibal put the pieces together after a few more moments worth of soothing caresses and heartfelt compliments from Will’s irresistible, husky drawl.

“Oh, no,” he groaned, shivering back from Will’s persistent attentions. He caught sight of the angry flash in Will’s eyes and froze in place.

“You’ll do as you’re told, Hannibal, or suffer far worse consequences. I think I told you to lean over the goddamn car and take your punishment. What’s it going to be?”

Hmm. This was-- what to do? If Hannibal held out for the ‘worse consequences,’ would he finally get the result he was so painstakingly aiming for, or would it be wiser to endure this horrendous onslaught of kind, gradual, thoughtfully sensitive affection?

In the end, despite vacillating between possible decisions for several beats while Will fumed impatiently behind him, Hannibal whispered his assent. He could not resist Will’s touch when offered, especially in punishment. This would indeed be one of the most potent tests Will had ever issued him as to endurance.

Will took his time to slowly worship nearly every inch of Hannibal’s body, kissing and licking at his warm, highly sensitive skin around and through the sinful attire. His insistent but tenderly attentive mouth felt so slick and sensuous, warm wetness through the soft mesh driving Hannibal insane with need to be fucked hard, taken for all he was worth until he couldn’t walk straight.

But Will took his sweet time, kissed and licked but did not bite, never grabbed Hannibal by the hips and dug his fingers in to leave bruises to replace Cami's abuse, refused to spank Hannibal's obediently presented ass. The older man was shaking, having a more difficult time standing remotely upright with every lazy, enveloping sweep of Will's tongue.

"Don't you think you've teased me enough?" he panted into his hands, tears dotting his vision from the build-up of foreplay that had so far just barely excluded his erogenous zones.

He heard the snarl in Will's voice when the boy grabbed at the mesh shorts and ripped them open in the back. Hannibal's heart somersaulted as he let out a loud moan, victorious at last.

"Naughty, naughty Daddy," Will snapped, wrapping an arm around Hannibal's waist and caressing his belly. He pressed his hard cock roughly against Hannibal's ass where he had torn the fancy underwear open, then said tartly in his ear, "I hope you enjoyed that, because your bad behavior hasn't been sufficiently punished, and you won't trick or surprise me into any more rough stuff. I'm going to draw this out even longer than I had planned, and be even *nicer* about it. Except, of course, that you are absolutely not allowed to come."

At least this, in an ironically savoring way, gave Hannibal some form of true punishment. He didn't care about orgasming; he just wanted Will at his most ruthless.

Hannibal shoved his ass back against Will's rigid erection, but the friction was gone just as quickly, and he didn't get the spanking he wanted to earn from such scandalous misbehavior. This was terrible: the worse he acted, the *less* discipline he received! And his head was spinning so profoundly with lust and deprivation of his needs that he could not devise any approach to defeat Will - his boy was simply too clever and determined for such shenanigans to succeed, at any rate.

So it was that he found himself seeking purchase in vain with sweat-blurring fingertips on the trunk of the Bentley, smudging the perfect finish of his luxury car, willing himself not to move an inch otherwise, head ducked submissively down on the hard trunk. Will was eating him out, stroking Hannibal's aching cock in tandem with the rhythmic lapping of his hot, knowing tongue, humming with enjoyment of the experience, worship of Hannibal's body clearly mixed with pleasure at the doctor's defeat, now his surrender.

"Aww, look how good you're doing, holding still for your punishment," Will murmured, squeezing Hannibal's cock with just the right amount of pressure to hold off an impending, very slowly built orgasm, hushing the gasping cry of distress that flew from the older man's lips.

Will went right back to licking at Hannibal's hole, applying all his devastating oral skills but too tentatively, always just short of making him come and never giving the relieving ecstasy of his fingers or cock inside the body that yearned for it so keenly. Three times, he resumed his stroking of Hannibal's weeping cock only long enough to make him nearly climax before he halted the sensations abruptly, right before the culmination.

Hannibal wept, newly aware he had been drooling with the intensity of the last climax which had built to only a half-second away from cresting. He slammed his fist on the trunk, making

a slight indentation because his body was strong even when his heart was a weak, sopping mess over Will, subject to the boy's every wickedly righteous whim.

"Aaahh," Will moaned, and his face fell to Hannibal's back. The doctor realized his lover's hand had dipped to his own cock and he had brought himself off to the sound and feel of Hannibal's edging, the knowledge that Hannibal's pleasure was in his power and he had denied it. "*Fuck,* Daddy," he sighed, finally taking slight mercy, as it seemed, on his lover by slicking his still hard dick against Hannibal's entrance several times, then easing it deep inside with a long, euphoric stroke, thrusting several times -- too slow, but deliberate, calculating, enough to draw out his own orgasm and mark Hannibal with his cum. He avoided Hannibal's prostate with his selfish, indulgent fucking, and he held Hannibal by the shoulders, murmuring sweet nothings again, "So good for me, you feel amazing. You like that, hmm?"

Hannibal's head lolled dizzily atop his sweaty hands that had streaked his pristine vehicle with more messiness. "Y-yes, baby, please, please don't stop, whatever you do…"

"But I have to," Will said regretfully, yet in his hushed tone there was that same evil intent that he spoke with when they killed their victims. He was pulling Hannibal apart just as violently in the most tender, torturous way.

"You'll learn to respect my rules, Daddy, one way or another. If this is what it takes to get you back on good behavior, well…" Will pulled himself from the tight, slick embrace of Hannibal's body with a regretful moan. "Mmm. It's the least I can do."

He sniffed, out of breath himself from the work of *not* losing his temper physically, and gave Hannibal a few more feather-light kisses on his reddened face. "I'm going to head into the house and get your nice, comfy bathrobe. You must be freezing," he smiled cruelly.

Hannibal whimpered pathetically and squeezed his eyes shut, still leaning into every kiss until they were gone.

Will returned shortly thereafter with his plush robe and wrapped it around him. "I hope you'll order another one of those outfits, Daddy," he cooed, tying the cord neatly around Hannibal's waist, then pulling his lover into a snug embrace, rubbing his back. "I'd love to rip it off you when you're fully recovered. Then you'll get a taste of everything I've been holding back."

"Oh, thank goodness," Hannibal moaned, pins-and-needles as his hands feebly tried to cling to Will. He followed that with a series of Lithuanian curses which contained certain accusations that did not escape Will's notice.

"I may not speak your native language, but I have an excellent ear for linguistic nuances." Will's tone was raspy with amusement. "I know you're frustrated, honey, but you have to trust me to take care of you, and that's all there is to it. Don't rebel against me again. Okay?"

"Very well." Hannibal pridefully stood taller, parting from Will's hug and turning to retrieve the tray of food. "I'll bring this inside and reheat lunch. I'm quite famished and you must be even more so."

“Hannibal,” Will said, brow knitting at the more serious angry-sad in his fiance’s tone. “You were held prisoner and starved for days. What that does to you, physically and mentally? It’s going to take more than a couple of weeks for you to be fully yourself again. You know I just don’t want to hurt you.”

“I’d best get going,” Hannibal returned dryly, his hair matted to his brow but his old regal dignity resurfacing strong as ever. “It will be bedtime soon, I’m sure.”

Will rolled his eyes. A glance at the clock confirmed it was barely one pm. “Hannibal.”

“Would you look at the time,” said the older man crisply.

He stalked off with what elegance he could muster, still wobbly from sex that had not fulfilled his libido’s intense cravings, and he knew very well he wasn’t allowed to come unless it was at Will’s command or with his permission. While minding Will’s rules, he would certainly make his own views known.

“Honey, please don’t be mad now,” Will sighed, stroking a hand through his ruffled curls.

He had stripped his shirt off while fucking Hannibal, but tossed it on before going back into the cold again, having learned his lesson when he nearly froze in the late January chill popping into the house to grab Hannibal’s damn robe. Why couldn’t Hannibal understand Will was only looking after him? Will guessed maybe he wouldn’t really get it until some time had gone by and proved Will’s heart was in the right place through Hannibal’s healthy recovery.

Was he being paranoid and overprotective?

He bit his lip, not bothering with the buttons on his flannel but leaving it open over his bare chest, not even remembering he had left his jeans in a crumpled heap by the Bentley and was now wearing his “Gone Fishin’” boxer shorts, his loosely tied grey Converse and nothing else save for a smear of motor oil across his forehead that liberally decorated one sleeve of the flannel and his hands as well.

Will didn’t care what the hell he was wearing; he was so torn between guilt at hurting Hannibal’s feelings and disappointing him -- and then his own firm belief it was better to be gentle until every scratch and bruise healed up, until every trace of the drug withdrawal had faded -- wait till then, when Hannibal was fresh and new for him, and every mark would be left only by Will himself, for pleasure and claiming alone. What if he went too hard on Hannibal and reopened a wound -- mental or physical?

He was a psychoanalytical genius and he *understood* trauma; hell, they both did. Why was Hannibal pretending stubborn ignorance to the fact he *needed* more time to recover before rough sex?

The only roughness he’d just given was in the edging, and that, even that, while a necessary measure of discipline to teach his lover an important lesson -- might have been too harsh a method given Hannibal’s still delicate state of mind and body.

Regrets, confusion and frustration swirled through his mind, but all he could really decide was that he needed to talk this through with Hannibal. He'd apologize if he was too stubborn on his side and make sure the orgasm denial hadn't upset Hannibal much more than intended -- then they could talk about all of this until they agreed on the best course of action and things made some level of sense again.

Resolved, he made a quick path through the yard, sneakers briefly squeaking in the grass wet with recently melted snow, then cut through the side door into the kitchen. Hannibal wasn't there as he expected -- but the food had been returned to the oven to reheat because he was too fucking snobby to use the microwave (adorable; Will's heart warmed automatically). Scrumptious aromas of slow-cooked meat filled the kitchen, and his lover had left a decanter of newly opened, insanely expensive Chardonnay out on the counter.

This told him there was no way Hannibal went far. He was capable of many deeds in anger, but never was he capable of wasting fine wine by allowing a chilled one to go warm from neglect. The two ice-fogged wine glasses on the other counter by the sink confirmed this as much as the muffled noise of water running in the nearest bathroom.

Ah, that made sense. But as Will processed relief that Hannibal would be out in a minute, so they could talk and he could ignore the rising swell of his own traumatized near-panic at not being able to locate his lover immediately -- his eyes darted back to the wine decanter. He thought about the night before, when Hannibal had bragged so proudly he had a special surprise planned for Will today, and they would finally enjoy this "Judgment of Paris 1973 Chateau Montelena Chardonna" to celebrate.

At the time, Will had been charmed like a teacher's pet by Hannibal's cute tendency to go off on tangents regarding his lofty interests, and had asked about the meaning of the "judgement of paris" thing, which had lost him a good twenty minutes of his life which he would never want back, time spent staring at Hannibal while he cooked and blabbed on and on about French history, lingering of course on all the bloodiest stories.

In all that though, he'd forgotten about the planned surprise, which must have been the afternoon seduction via skimpy outfit, and God, he could slap himself in the head. He should have been more understanding, talked it out instead of -- oh, poor Hannibal. Will groaned in self-blaming regret. He was going to apologize and ask for a redo the second Hannibal came out of the--

A ring of the doorbell at the front entrance cut through his distracted worries. Still unconcerned with his half-dressed and dirty appearance, Will hurried to the door planning to get rid of whoever it was; if it was another door to door sales person, he might indulge a quick kill for stress relief, guilt-free.

But when he opened the door with an annoyed expression that warned whoever it was to "get lost", his jaw dropped at the sight of two very strange and fancy visitors.

The man, with his flawless three piece suit, chiseled features and superior, disapproving expression, simply had to be related to Hannibal. It was eerie to Will, who had never met a blood relative of his fiance before, to suddenly be confronted by someone with such similar

features. This guy was around 70 with steel-grey hair and smooth enough features to ensure Will could expect Hannibal to keep aging amazingly well.

Yet the woman by his side seemed a mismatch. She was medium height and stunning, with skin of peachy-ivory luminescence and long raven hair spilled over one shoulder, half of it pinned up in a diamond piece that looked like it cost more than Hannibal's whole house. Instead of an accusing look at Will, she offered a confused but sincere smile of greeting.

Only then did Will look down at himself and remember what he was wearing and *not* wearing -- this probably explained why the man seemed so offended, the lady politely baffled.

And only once Will had been standing with his mouth hanging open in an uncharacteristic moment of profound social awkwardness for a few seconds longer than would really be forgivable in the best circumstances (say, if his shirt was buttoned, if he was wearing pants, or even if he smelled less like sex), did Hannibal appear, looking absolutely infuriated.

He kept it inside, but Will knew Dr. Lecter's face and how the rage built like a tea kettle left on the stove too long until he finally exploded. Now he kept the anger bottled up neat as the buttons on his uncle's suit, but as to his own attire he wasn't doing much better than Will for welcoming company -- the robe at least covered most of him, and he'd washed up in the bathroom, but the top of his mesh shirt peeked from the v in his robe, and the rush job he'd done slicking sink water through his hair hadn't done much to disguise the intimacy into which his relatives (?) had barged.

The male visitor glared at Hannibal and scoffed in a thick Lithuanian accent, "I suppose you have some sordidly unconvincing explanation as to what all this is." He gestured to Will as the main "thing that needed explaining," but his hand also waved at Hannibal's sturdily unrepentant figure.

For all the shame Hannibal showed at the older man's clear disapproval, anyone would think the relatives (?) had arrived to find him dressed in Armani and hosting a lavish dinner party for the President of the United States, all the crowned heads of Europe, and Adele. Even as confused as he was, Will loved that about Hannibal, the iron pride, the unmovable ego, the insistent dignity that said he would do just as he liked and to hell with what anyone thought of him and his lover.

Taking it all in, scratching his stubbled jaw as questions piled up higher than the leaning tower of Pisa in his mind, Will's big blue eyes fluttered from his morally indignant fiance to his morally indignant relative (?) and the elegantly polite woman who seemed too normal for this entire situation.

"Uncle Robertus," Hannibal said, smoldering resentment in every syllable of his smooth tone. "Lady Murasaki. What on earth are you doing here?"

Chapter End Notes

Next time: An eventful visit from Dr. Lecter's family ensues -- bringing more secrets from Hannibal's past to light and causing drama all around. Plus...is Hannibal finally going to get what he *really, really wants* from Will in an unexpected way? 🤔🖤

Hypocrates

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"I can explain," Will blurted nonsensically, fingers fumbling over the buttons of his shirt until it was fastened.

The guests blinked at him with two versions of expectant curiosity: Robertus, furious and Murasaki, mildly amused.

Hannibal turned to Will and said drily, "Oh? Can you?"

His eyes were tired, still angry with him, and lightly playful. Will felt with a rush of relief that while his lover still appeared hurt and resentful, they were now comrades at arms against the same awkward scenario, which united them, at least for now.

"I'll go and dress," Will proposed helpfully, wishing his cheeks weren't burning quite so hotly. He must look like a sexed up tomato in stupid fishing-themed boxer shorts.

"You do that," Robertus snapped irritably. To Hannibal, he said arrogantly, "Are you planning to invite us in?"

Will fled to the bedroom like a bat out of hell and Hannibal faced his family with indignation. "Are you planning to elaborate on the reason for your presence?"

"We heard that you are engaged!" Murasaki smiled, gracious as ever, smoothing over Robertus' blatant disregard for and attempts to control his nephew, as she always had. She also appeared truly happy for him, so Hannibal offered her a small bow and pressed her hand with an accepting smile.

"You are most welcome, Lady Murasaki," Hannibal greeted more properly. "Do come in."

He ignored his uncle, who would obviously go where he pleased irregardless of basic propriety, so long as the intruded on person bore the Lecter name - making them his property, as head of the noble family and preserver of its dignified name.

"I'll show you to the study, where you may relax with a drink while I go and dress, then prepare an appropriately welcoming repast." Hannibal was good at maintaining his elegant mystique regardless of attire, and truly didn't feel the least embarrassment for being scantily clad in his own home, as was clearly his right.

Will's embarrassment, however, like a teenaged boy caught "making out" by his parents flicking the outside light on while he kissed his date on the front steps, that had been undeniably endearing. Adorable, in fact. Hannibal was torn between annoyance, still wishing to be angry with his boy, and the desire to forget their earlier argument. It was difficult, at any rate, to be mad at anyone else if Robertus was present.

One only had so much wrath to spare, after all, and his uncle was a veritable human sponge for the emotion.

“What a beautiful home, Hannibal,” said Murasaki in her lovely voice like the tinkling of bells.

Hannibal took her coat and said in his charming, courtly way, “Dear aunt, are you not intending to begin the aging process at some point? You put the rest of us to shame.”

Murasaki laughed, “Your old tricks still work on me. I’ll accept the compliment.”

Her step-nephew gestured to the chairs by the crackling fire, and Murasaki sank into her seat gratefully.

“And I shall be right back with a glass of--”

“We don’t need your liquor,” Robertus grumbled. “Nor a tour of your house, although it would have been proper of you to at least begin with that. We are here to demand an explanation for your outrageous conduct, and to bring you to your senses before you drag the Lecter dynasty down to the dust with your--”

“Au contraire,” Murasaki put in nimbly. She wore a black cashmere sweater with a collar of little dotted pearls, her pure white trousers and sky-high ivory pumps perfectly matched. Examining her french manicure, she added slyly, “I am here to visit with Hannibal, to meet his fiance, and to have a glass of wine, of course.”

She winked and Hannibal gave her the look he used to when he was seventeen, the one that thanked her for being the only one aside from Chiyoh who looked out for him and tried to divert his uncle’s brusque disapproval or mould it magically into a better mood on the strength of her own formidable, cool calm.

Robertus rolled his eyes and Murasaki crossed her legs, one high heel bobbing as she patiently awaited the temporary resolution of the latest deadlock between uncle and nephew.

“The first of many we will share, I hope.” Hannibal hung the coats in the closet, trying to direct his feelings towards positive impressions for the sake of surviving this ordeal.

He procured a glass of warming cherry merlot for his aunt and a whiskey neat for Robertus, which he passed without a word, his uncle whipping the tumbler from his hand and glaring.

Then he pranced upstairs as if walking on air, although the cinders of long-held rage still flamed within his heart and mind. He would surely prefer a long and painful demise to ever showing a hint of his true and vulnerable emotions before his uncle’s cruel eyes.

How he hated those golden-brown eyes which so resembled his own, and those of his father, that it was a constant source of haunting despair, Robertus’ face a warning and reminder -- everything he wanted to leave in the past. Now that he had established himself and achieved happiness, of course Robertus must turn up to try and destroy it. This was nothing new, although deferred long enough that he had allowed himself to believe it would not occur.

“Hey,” Will said gently, emerging from the bedroom in a stunning suit and tie, his best shiny black loafers, hair slicked back; he looked like a dream and it was all Hannibal could do not to back him against the wall and have him then and there. God knew it would make him feel much better.

“You okay?” the profiler added, pausing in his way back downstairs to play host, holding Hannibal’s hand in his warm, reassuring grip, prying his heart open with a single gaze.

“A complicated inquiry,” Hannibal replied, his voice crisp and unbothered. He brushed a kiss to Will’s cheek and walked past, turning briefly back just to add, “Please go down and play host; I suppose I will have to offer you some attempt at illumination upon the topic of my uncle later, when we are alone.”

“They brought luggage,” Will noted, referring to the suitcases in the front entranceway. “Looks like they planned on staying at least the night.”

“To be avoided if at all possible, and I believe it will be.” Hannibal pulled his eyes from Will with difficulty and walked into the bedroom, closing the door behind him.

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Will trotted downstairs like he had the world on a string and strolled into the study like he owned the place to remind himself, despite Uncle Robertus’ clear attitude problem, he was dressed to impress, over the initial shock of visitors of such importance appearing with zero warning, and he did halfway own the place.

Robertus was in his home, after all. Will grinned and said cheerfully, “Let’s try that again. So great to meet you both. I’m Will Graham, Hannibal’s--”

“So we gathered,” Robertus snipped. Will couldn’t help thinking he acted like a very overgrown toddler and seemed uncomfortable in his own skin, regularly taking his snobby, petulant insecurity out on everyone else.

Unlike Hannibal, Robertus was no people person and lacked self control to such an extent Will intuited he must be exceedingly wealthy to get away with it, or have such a gorgeous and nice wife.

“We are...so happy for you both,” Murasaki ventured, but Robertus cut her off gruffly.

“No we are most certainly not.” He thrust his hands in the pockets of his rust-colored suit jacket, scowling, as his wife sighed and cast an apologetic, sympathizing smile at Will.

“Your kindness leads you to danger, my love,” Robertus fumed. “Think of what is due to the Lecter line before you dole out congratulations for our nephew giving his royal name to this riffraff--”

“Really, Robertus,” Murasaki objected, rising from her chair and placing her half-empty wine glass on the side table.

Her husband stood by the fire, his similarly imbibed-from glass of whiskey sitting on the mantel top. He had on a burnt orange silk tie with a matching pocket square, and while Will always felt like a total masquerader in such attire, like Hannibal, Robertus seemed at home in the fussy, exquisitely matched, doubtless insanely pricey, tailored suit.

Absent-mindedly, Will thought Robertus ought to know better than to put a glass there and maybe leave a water-mark, and that it was lucky the whiskey had been served neat and not rocks. He didn't need Hannibal melting down over a mark on his precious mantle, on top of the rest of this weirdness.

There was a lot to distract Will, even more so once Hannibal came back in, in full host mode -- dressed to the nines in a suave red and grey check suit with a flashy floral tie. It was as if he had to go down the color spectrum to blood red in order to beat out his uncle's orange suit. He had his hair gelled and pushed back, and in his firm hands was a large appetizer tray, covered in all the best of what they had on hand in the fridge.

Since Will had done most of the cooking lately, there were crostinis with smoked salmon and cream cheese, stuffed mushrooms, shrimp cocktail and rolls of prosciutto and provolone -- instead of fois gras and oysters a la Rockefeller such as Hannibal would have normally had ready for any surprise guests.

There was nothing wrong with Will's grocery choices or cooking; he was really good at it by anyone's normal standards, and even Hannibal told him he enjoyed the food and offered (handsy, dirty) compliments to the chef.

"Some small offerings to tide the busy travelers over until I can prepare something more hearty for dinner," Hannibal explained with cold cordiality and the perfectly charming curves of his husky accent that would dazzle anyone. Still dazzled Will, most of all. He could listen to that sexy voice forever, but he heard his lover's unhappiness loud and clear.

"I have a roast from earlier this afternoon which I will continue reheating for--"

As Hannibal set the tray down on the coffee table in front of the guests, Robertus looked over at it as if it contained a can of Spam and a bag of Skittles.

"What is this? *This* is what you have to offer us, after such a long time, when we finally visit you?"

Murasaki muttered to Robertus, "*My dear*," starting to get low-key irritated and scolding now. She made herself a nice little plate of what was on offer with a nod of thanks to Hannibal, who returned the silent gesture of solidarity, still ignoring Robertus to the fullest extent possible.

With so much distraction, it was only now that Will caught up with his own myriad revelations.

"Wait a minute." He spoke bluntly, standing by Murasaki's chair, looking over at the three others in shock. "*Royal* name? Hannibal, you're Lithuanian royalty? And never happened to mention it to me before?"

Hannibal's cheeks turned pink and Robertus answered for him. "I am not surprised. Clearly, my nephew views his status as Count and heir to the grand Lecter tradition with so little respect that he did not feel it worth telling you."

"You're a *count*?" Will walked over to Hannibal, who was needlessly moving items around on the desk, avoiding eye contact. "Like Count Dracula? Or…" Will crossed his arms then wiped a hand over his face, thinking, of all things -- of Sesame Street. "*The Count*?"

"I wished to inform you of the fact in my own time," Hannibal murmured. He gave Will such a pained look, Will was just about ready to bring him upstairs, wrap him in blankets and cuddle him for the rest of the night, visitors be damned.

"Shameful," his uncle interrupted. "You are utterly unprepared for our visit, your so-called fiance is about as appropriate a match as this appetizer presentation is to our tastes and traditions, and this house of yours, which obviously hasn't had a roof update in--"

"Whoa, whoa, whoa," Will cut him off, shielding Hannibal by stepping in front of him. In most situations, Dr. Lecter was incontestably formidable, but being around his uncle somehow sent him into a childlike place of passivity. "Don't you talk to him like that. We had no idea you were arriving for a visit, you showed up out of nowhere."

"The audacity," Robertus hissed, going red in the face. "Addressing me with such-- there was a letter, did you not receive my letter announcing our intention to visit?"

"There never was a letter," Hannibal answered, still hovering behind Will, now making two more drinks which they definitely needed. "There never is one. This is a ruse which Robertus uses to make it impossible for me to avoid his visits. Thankfully, it is a rare occasion which prompts him to turn up. In this case, he heard of our engagement."

He unbuttoned his jacket and sat down behind the desk, taking a long sip of iced brandy.

Will glowered at Robertus. Murasaki said, "Did you really never write to tell them--"

"Of course I wrote!" Robertus stormed around the room, casting a look of disapproval at every artwork and knicknack.

"A likely story." Will walked up to Robertus and gestured with his hand for the man to stop raging. "Slow down. Sit down. You're in our house, not some regal domain you can insult. Where the hell were you when Hannibal was missing, when we learned he had been kidnapped and he had a difficult recovery? *I* sent you a letter, and an email, countless voicemails, to every contact back in Lithuania I could find among Hannibal's papers, at least one of those addresses had to be yours. Did you know what happened to him?"

"Yes," Robertus admitted. He looked about ready to punch Will, but forced himself to sit down in the chair beside his wife's, as if reluctant to lower himself to Will's level of aggression. "But we knew he was perfectly fine, so our presence was not needed. Having learned of his plans to throw himself away on a pathetic commoner, our visit has now become a vital measure."

“Are you fucking with us right now?” Will stared at Robertus, hands perched on his hips, eyes huge with indignation. “You cannot be serious.”

“Serious as the grave, you vulgar brat. Hannibal, what are this young man’s claims to seek out your regal hand in matrimony? What is his title?”

“Special Agent,” Will snapped, and Hannibal smiled, his eyes warm on his fiance. “Or sometimes Professor.”

“Best Dog Dad Ever,” Hannibal put in, and as if summoned, the dogs came wandering in then, fresh from a nap.

Robertus stared as the seven dogs greeted their masters and guests enthusiastically, and when Buster leaped up to perch his tiny paws on the snobby man’s knees, he cringed back. “Get off of me, you vile mutt. I suppose these repulsive creatures came with you, Special Agent?”

“Don’t insult my dogs,” Will ordered, deadly dislike flaring in his eyes.

“Spare the innocent and lovable creatures your usual rudeness, Uncle,” Hannibal added as Murasaki cooed over Zoe and petted Winston’s head with a delighted smile.

“How adorable,” she enthused. “What a nice little family you’ve built here, Hannibal.”

“None of these mutts are your family,” Robertus insisted.

“I beg to differ.” Hannibal came to stand beside Will and put an arm around the younger man’s waist, squeezing him close. “This is my fiance, Special Agent Will Graham, Professor Will Graham, the finest profiler the FBI has ever had, the healer and protector of my heart, excellent ‘Dog Dad’ and fisherman, builder of boats. He rescued me in more ways than you will ever understand and I am proud to have plans of giving him my name. It’s the least he deserves, but I plan to spend the rest of my life showing my gratitude and adoration towards him, come what may, and certainly with no regard whatsoever for your views on the subject.”

“Babe,” Will sniffled, wiping a tear away with a shaky, lovestruck laugh. He hugged Hannibal back and squeezed tighter. “That was beautiful.”

“That sounded like wedding vows,” Murasaki sighed, daintily pressing a kleenex to her own wet eyes.

“If you plan to insult Will or our dogs again, you may leave, Uncle. You know where the door is. If you choose to stay, you are welcome, but you must follow respectful decorum towards those I hold dear.” Hannibal remained by Will’s side, holding his lover’s hand, solid in his words.

“Indecorous?” Robertus sputtered. “Of all the--”

“Preposterous?” Will suggested.

“Assuming? Boundary violating?” Hannibal offered.

“Disappointing?” Murasaki lifted her dark, elegantly slender eyebrows and batted her lashes in quiet, firm reprimand of her spouse. At the same time, she continued petting Winston, who had settled in comfortably with his head resting on her knee.

“You are all ludicrous, attacking me as though I had any motivation other than protecting a beloved nephew from the artful machinations of a fortune hunting nobody. And you, Hannibal, always you take every word from my lips *so personally.* Why must you be so immature, so *defensive* and *sensitive,* it is impossible to have a reasonable discussion.”

This line of phrases seemed to strike Hannibal like three bullets to the heart of the child within: *taking it personally, defensive, sensitive.* The way Hannibal cringed with pursed lips and bright, hurt eyes made Will realize he must have heard these terms repeated towards him constantly when Robertus was his guardian years ago.

“That’s enough,” Will scowled, raising one finger as anyone would chastise an unruly child. “Mr. Lecter--”

“Grand Duke Robertus,” the nobleman corrected him, shoulders squared in unrelenting battle mode.

“You may have one more chance to remain under our roof and commence a more pleasant visit,” Hannibal determined, “I offer this more out of respect for Lady Murasaki than anything else. And then, if you decide to continue your unacceptable conduct, you will be turned out of doors. Forcibly, if need be. Aunt, you of course are welcome to stay as long as you would prefer.”

“Thank you, Hannibal, Thank you, Will. I’m most humbled by your patience and appreciative of your gracious welcome.” She smiled, scratching behind Winston’s ears as the dog let out a happy nose whistle.

Murasaki’s enjoyment of watching her husband being put in his place was about as puzzling as her seemingly eternal patience with Robertus or that she married him in the first place. Will found her confusing, even with his keen people reading skills. His instincts moved him to like her, and he felt she was a good, kind woman who had always been a friend to Hannibal when his fiance had sorely needed one.

Something else in the way she and Hannibal glanced at each other added to Will’s confusion and subtracted from his ability to accurately, fully canvas her character based on this first meeting. They shared secrets that were heavy, yet instantly communicated. He felt oddly left out in those glances, which discomforted him in a way he couldn’t put his finger on. Still, she was Mother Theresa compared to her husband -- that much was certain.

“Come, Will, I need your assistance in the kitchen,” Hannibal requested, casual as could be. “You may have until dinner is served to make your decision, Uncle. Aunt, there are fresh towels in all of the bathrooms, and you may choose any of the guest rooms you like.”

“I’m happy just as I am, but I thank you both again for the accommodations.” Buster had fallen back asleep on top of Murasaki’s fancy shoes.

Robertus had little left to do but frown and glare at his whiskey. “Very well. While inaccurate, rude and absurd, I shall consider your offer, if for no other reason than to avail myself of the chance to weigh in on your life choices.”

“I wish you great luck in all these endeavors.” Hannibal crooked an arm out to Will. “Shall we?”

“We shall,” Will winked lovingly. As they made their exit, he said to Robertus in passing, “You know, you could have had shrimp cocktail.”

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In the kitchen, Will expected them to immediately begin planning how dinner would be prepared and plated, but instead he found himself backed against the nearest wall by strong, warm hands, then treated to a series of equally warm and firm kisses, wet and sweet.

Will moaned into the vigor of Hannibal’s kiss and slid his tongue against the older man’s, wrapping his arms around Hannibal’s neck. “What is this for? Not that I’m complaining,” he said on hectic breaths between scorching kisses, Hannibal’s hands scrambling lustfully, adoringly over his body, sweeping down his sides to grip his hips then caress and squeeze his ass.

“You defended me to my uncle,” Hannibal muttered, eyes fogged with emotion and desire as he kissed every inch of Will’s face then lapped and bit his boy’s neck, tugging brunette curls at the same time, absorbing Will’s soft cries of pleasure like the only sustenance he required, despite the growling emptiness of both their bellies from skipping lunch.

“Well, he shouldn’t treat you that way. How fucking dare he? I’ll kick him out myself if it comes to it.” Will groaned with delight at Hannibal’s attentions and felt his lover up with equal intensity, coasting his open palm over the firm but soft lines of pectoral, pressing his thumb knowingly to peak a nipple, then lightly twist, his other hand roving hungrily on Hannibal’s perfect ass. “God, you’re sexy in that fucking suit,” he panted, “But honey, shouldn’t we stop so we can make dinner?”

Hannibal growled, picked Will up and sat him on the counter for more hot, relentless kissing, making three new hickies that he wouldn’t stop nipping and sucking until he had marked Will to bruising effect, and Will leaned into it, giggling when it tickled, gasping when it hurt, gripping at Hannibal’s shoulders in the debonair plaid blazer, pleasure tingling through him and making him hard. “Hey, take it easy, your -- still healing,” Will managed to moan, sensible as he could manage.

But Hannibal merely huffed a darkly flirtatious laugh, then undid Will’s pants and yanked them down, along with his underwear, while Will lifted his hips in helpless acquiescence. He was too turned on to stop, even though they could both hear the guests talking in the other room, Robertus complaining, Murasaki talking him down. Fuck, they could be caught any second, and that made it hotter.

“Gotta be quick,” Will warned, but Hannibal was a man on a mission in no need for these words of caution. He spread Will’s thighs with a desperate, claiming grope, then enveloped

his cock down to the base in his mouth without further preamble.

Will's eyes rolled back and he muttered countless, fiery and building swears, fucking hard into the exquisite wet heat of Hannibal's gorgeous and ever-knowing mouth, coming down his throat with a rough shout he had to cut off by slapping one of his own hands over his lips, more curses spilling into his fingers as his hips kept spasming and Hannibal sucked him into overstimulation, seeming delirious on driving Will crazy with pleasure.

"Yes, Daddy, yes, you're so good to me," Will moaned and shivered, his pillowy lips kiss-swollen, his pupils dilated with the intense euphoria of the quickie, his curls once neatly styled now falling in pretty twists over his brow.

Shaking, his limbs heavy with afterglow, he managed to ease himself down from the countertop and undo Hannibal's own trousers, making out with his fiance like it was the end of the world and these were their last chances for sultry intimacy. He devoured Hannibal's mouth with raunchy kisses full of tongue and teeth, not caring he was still out of breath and wobbly-legged, because nothing could have held him back from pleasuring his lover in return.

"So big for me, and so hard," he mumbled heatedly, slipping his hand down Hannibal's pants and grasping his leaking cock, starting to stroke exactly the way the doctor liked best, a firm grip, a hard rhythm, every move practically a command to come, from his thumb caressing the tip and adding more precum to slick the glide up and down, to his kiss, obscene as he bit Hannibal's lower lip and sucked it. His long fingers worked Hannibal's beautifully engorged cock with complete worship.

"Will, baby, please, just -- like that --" Hannibal's breath quickened, his heart somersaulting then slamming his ribcage, his words devolving into Lithuanian obscenities and French terms of endearment for Will, always a good indication he was getting close.

Will fell to his knees at the exact right moment and tugged Hannibal's pants down enough to replace his hand with his mouth, sucking when Hannibal came, creamy and over and over and over, shuddering and thrusting deep into his boy's eagerly waiting mouth, hand heavy on Will's head, gripping curls for dear life.

"Now then," he grinned, showing off his cute fangs, fastening his trousers as Will stood and leaned on the counter, getting his breath back. "Shall we see to the dinner?"

Chapter End Notes

Next time: So how come Uncle Robertus hasn't been dinner yet? What secrets are shared between Hannibal and Murasaki? How are these four going to survive a family dinner, and later, what will Maddie and Travis make of Hannibal's relatives?

What does Hannibal do that earns him the spanking of a lifetime from Will? 😏

These answers and more, coming soon. ✨✨✨😈

the older you get, the less you cry

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"*So,*" Will said, forcing his thousandth awkward but well-intentioned smile of the night.

Dinner was almost ready, but Hannibal asked him to come into the dining room for basic hospitality's sake, since the two of them had tarried so long in their stolen tryst that the roast was late in reheating, the carrots still unfortunately hard and in need of about twenty minutes more cooking in a honeyed-sage concoction.

He could smell the rich, tender meat and the herb-honey marinade on the carrots, even the light peppery touch added by the potato wedges (or, he guessed Hannibal said they were 'garlic thyme fondant potatoes' but they pretty much looked like potato wedges to Will--). His stomach rumbled loudly. It was definitely his turn to fill the suspended, pregnant silence between himself, Robertus and Murasaki, and he was now aware he had most likely only said "So."

He fiddled with his knife and fork as Robertus continued staring him down as if doing so might helpfully turn Will to stone.

Will had an uncomfortable mental image of Robertus stalking across the dining room to his chair on the other side of the table, picking up the ice pick from Hannibal's fancy iced drink layout and striking Statue Will until he crumbled into stone fragments on the rug.

"So, do you like garlic thyme fondant potatoes?" He flashed a grin and thought of his phone burning a hole in his pocket.

He'd sent a desperate text a few minutes ago, when he first sat down at the long, severe-looking table surrounded by Hannibal's indoor herb garden, the windows with their view onto the snow-speckled backyard looking like a welcome opportunity to run away. Subtly, as he thought, he glanced down at the pocket of his blazer and half-pulled out his phone. Hmm, still no answer.

"Yes, they're splendid," Murasaki replied pleasantly. "Everything Hannibal makes is always superb."

She looked a bit sleepy, her face leaning on her pale hand and half-squashing her cheek in a rare show of less-than-perfect posture. Will knew she was doing her best to keep the painful attempt at pre-dinner chatting alive, but it was dead as a doornail -- Murasaki was tired, Will too hungry to think, too annoyed with Robertus to convincingly be a good host, and Robertus just wanted to lunge for the ice pick, except that he wasn't actually violent like Will or Hannibal. Robertus wasn't a killer; he was just a dick.

At the moment, Hannibal's Uncle was very much engaged in perusing a thick file of business reports which he had retrieved from his suitcase and used as a way to show Will he couldn't

care less for conversing with, much less actually getting to know his nephew's fiance.

The dogs were dozing in the corner and Will couldn't even count on them for moral support.

Pretending to be sprightly and unbothered at the long, tedious work of "entertaining" the guests, Will asked to be excused, prompting a smile from Murasaki, who was scrolling through some fancy fashion boutique's offerings on her huge iphone with its iced-out teflon tough case. Robertus merely grunted, glaring at his latest dull-looking bullet list of budgetary concerns.

Distantly, Will wondered why Robertus had to work and what the family business even entailed. Hannibal, of course, never spoke of the Lecters nor their concerns, and Will didn't have a clue what kind of job it was to be *Royal.*

"Honey," he prompted gently, entering the kitchen where his aproned lover was leaning over the steaming roast, adding another pinch of salt, brow furrowed in self-conscious appraisal. "Is it almost ready? I'm going to end up shish kebobed by Uncle Robertus' hate-filled glares if it takes much longer. This is dictionary definition 'tough crowd' territory, okay?"

Hannibal sighed, "Okay." He offered a wan smile, his soul clearly as weary as his jet-lagged Aunt's spirits. "I believe it would still benefit from closer inspection as to spice distribution and tenderness, but it will have to do."

Will snorted a laugh. Cannibalistic fare aside, the huge banquet Hannibal had prepared would make the editors of *Bon Appetit* magazine eat their snobby little hats with envy. It was gorgeous.

He could have swooned with ravenous hunger from the more intensely beckoning scents of savory perfection emanating from the roast, cooked rare as possible but with a firm outer skin, red juices pooling attractively around the thick cut of human meat. An extravagant salad surrounded the roast on the platter, resembling a wild and pretty miniature garden, all those crazy exotic veggies that Will had never seen before dating Hannibal and still couldn't remember the names of, varieties of rare delicacies in bright, fresh colors like a rainbow only in jewel tones. Still on the center island, the potatoes waited, grand little soft statues, not the browned wedges Will had expected. There was Yorkshire pudding, each one filled with homemade gravy, and Jesus. Robertus didn't deserve this, but Will was going to gobble it up like the treat it was.

And as for his very favorite treat…

Hannibal looked adorable with his confused expression at Will's sudden pause, the way the younger man stared at his oven-flushed cheeks and the stressed look in his caramel eyes, his rolled-up sleeves and his strong throat exposed by the first couple of buttons on his shirt, unfastened to help him cool off while baking and because he was a little upset still, needed to breathe.

"You look amazing, Daddy," Will praised softly, a private compliment no one would overhear from the dining room. He circled the counter and wrapped his arms around Hannibal from behind, cherishing the way Hannibal immediately relaxed against him, the scent of his

enticing, manly cologne and the warmth of him as Will buried half his face in the Ripper's neck. "Mmm. Can't we just go upstairs?"

"I only wish, mylimasis." With a regretful smile that they had already wasted enough time delaying the 'welcome' meal by doing…*things* in the kitchen earlier, Hannibal kissed Will's hand and rubbed his knuckles.

"If only every tiny, innocent thing you do to me didn't get me going," Will murmured, getting a little whiny and bratty, only worsening the situation, since this obviously called for Daddy's discipline.

"Naughty boy," Hannibal chuckled. He managed to evade the agent's spider monkey embrace and ordered, "You're to carry in the potatoes, and stop tempting Daddy when you know we must endure this meal prior to me *dismantling* you in bed later on."

"I want to be dismantled *now,*" said Will with an exaggerated pout and even a ridiculous little foot stomp.

He had a feeling that this game would lighten Hannibal's mood and distract him, make him laugh and never mind the pain of the past -- a lot of which Will just didn't understand as yet. All Will did know was how much he wanted to heal Hannibal's broken heart, love him all better, see him smile.

"Worry not, my dear." Hannibal's cool as a cucumber expression still held storm clouds of playful disapproval at Will's bratty antics. "I fully intend to ensure you won't be walking easily for days. I hope your preferred color to wear on that delightful behind of yours is *red.*"

"As it happens, yes, it is my favorite," Will smirked, picking a potato off the tray and nibbling it, breaking one of Hannibal's number one rules of dining. How rude, to sample the food before it was properly plated, especially when there were guests -- complicated guests, at that, and Hannibal so anxious to survive the responsible performance as host.

"And do you also enjoy being forced into shocking amounts of pleasure until your beautiful body, bound and shaking for me on the bed, nearly climaxes repeatedly, but never does? Perhaps not at all, unless I decide your behavior has improved." Hannibal continued speaking casually, the tone resembling the one he often used to half-interestedly describe his work day.

"How quickly the tables turn," Will remarked, carrying the tray of potatoes through to the dining room, wiggling his ass and swaying his hips the whole time, smothering a laugh into a throat clearing at the distinct sound of Hannibal's breath catching behind him.

He did enjoy Daddy's avid admiration. However, in the glow of Hannibal's stern eye-fucking, Will had not really been prepared to again confront the situation they now walked into, which was that Robertus was drumming his thick fingers on the table-top, glaring again, this time at his nephew. And Murasaki only roused from a light slumber and soft snoring sound by the low clang the metal tray of meat and salad made being neatly slid onto the table.

"I'm awake," Murasaki insisted with a profound yawn, her pretty hand fluttering over her widening mouth. "Excuse me."

“Quite alright, Lady Murasaki,” Hannibal answered with debonair charm.

He was doing that odd quirk again which Will had noticed before, *not* looking at his step-aunt even when speaking to her. Their eyes only ever seemed to voluntarily meet when expressing silent solidarity and annoyance at Robertus’ ongoing tirades.

Will, from being alight with prideful joy and feeling himself the most attractive person Hannibal had ever set eyes on, the center of Hannibal’s universe being right where he wanted to be, suddenly felt catapulted into the outer stratosphere, floating among seasick stars and indistinct bits of space rubble. There was a secret understanding that burned and threatened to flare into overt awareness of complex, fraught memories if Hannibal maintained eye contact with Murasaki for too long. Will didn’t like it one bit.

He sat down and flicked his napkin out onto his lap with unnecessary aggression. Hannibal cast him a baffled look, unsure why his mood had changed so abruptly. Will looked away, irritated that his lover had never bothered to tell him anything about his past, and he was here grappling after elusive clues that might tell him where he really stood in Hannibal’s world. In his heart.

He knew that Hannibal was in love with him, passionately, obviously, often even ridiculously, and that reminder almost made him smile and drop the strange burst of possessive jealousy and distrust building like a volcano inside him the more he watched the older man *not* interacting with Murasaki.

They were engaged but had not exchanged rings yet, waiting for the right time to spring each of their elaborate planned proposal scenes. But right now, Will would have felt better with Hannibal’s ring on his hand, proving his claim, that he was *the one.* He wasn’t sure why he felt that way, based on nothing more than a mild bit of a strange, weird, bizarre, unaccountable, not at all cool or appreciated vibe between step-nephew and step-aunt.

But he still didn’t like it one bit.

“I was considering ordering out for one of those disgustingly greasy hub cabs which you Americans call ‘pizzas,’ if I had to wait much longer for another of my nephew’s overly delayed meals,” Robertus growled in Will’s direction, blaming everything on Will having become a new favorite hobby, maybe even tied in first place with blaming everything on Hannibal.

The doorbell had the grace and mercy to ring, and Will practically jumped from his seat while the others gawked at him. “I’ll get it!” he declared eagerly. He started rapidly leaving the room, not asking Hannibal to be excused (he’d be in hot water for that later, too, if Daddy was still in charge by then. However, he doubted this to be the case, as his own disciplinary drive had started kicking in along with his probably unjustified and nonetheless fiery jealousy). But he stopped at the door and said to Robertus, “It’s hub *cap* by the way, and I’ll be sure to get you a Meatstravaganza from Domino’s while you’re here.”

Robertus scoffed and Will flounced out of the room, then stormed to the door and opened it to switch his face again to grateful greeting. “Thank God,” he sighed, giving his parents a hug and inviting them in.

“What’s this all about, son?” Travis asked, petting Winston’s head when the dog heard the new guests enter and padded over to say hi.

Maddie picked up Buster, who curled up in her arms and tried to lick her face. She laughed and said, “Hon, you said it was an emergency, but you look just fine. What all is the matter?”

“Fine and *fancy*,” Travis hooted, “How much that suit set you back? Is it a Tommy Hilfinger or somethin’? Looks like designer.”

Will skipped the pointless steps of educating his father on men’s high-end clothing (a topic he was still learning himself, but Hannibal had successfully brought him from the clearance rack at Marshall’s to the Dolce and Gabbana he currently wore) and answered his mom instead.

“Hannibal’s uncle and step-aunt showed up out of nowhere,” he muttered, “And apparently they’ll be staying here for a few days.”

“...potatoes are dry,” Will heard Robertus complaining from the dining room. Dammit, they needed to get in there for another rescue, stat.

“Not as dry as your conversation,” Hannibal retorted, and Murasaki made a comment about the weather in a flat, loud tone that told them both to stop fighting.

“What’s the matter with that?” Maddie whispered, oblivious to the context of what she might otherwise read as the sound of typical, loving bickering among family.

She scratched Buster’s head as the little dog panted appreciatively. Soon he squirmed, wanting to play, and scampered off along with his siblings towards the designated “canine recreation retreat” which Hannibal had created for the pets in the now-actually-refinished basement. Will had never thought -- even with his own considerable spoiling -- his dogs would ever be *this* pampered. It brought a grin to his face, even despite the ongoing strife of the Lecter family’s own version of the Royal *Godfather*.

“I mean, you always said you were dyin’ to finally meet Hannibal’s family. Isn’t this your big chance?” Travis crossed his arms, as ever the image of an older Will in a tweed blazer thrown on over a blue flannel and faded jeans. “What gives?”

“The uncle, who raised Hannibal from when he was a teenager, he’s very controlling and mean, Hannibal has zero patience with him, and the aunt, Murasaki, she's....uhh, lovely. We’ll all die of awkwardness without you guys, that’s the SOS. Please intervene,” Will begged. “Mom? Parent-teacher conference, tenth grade?”

“Ah.” Maddie straightened her shoulders. “I see.”

Tenth grade, third quarter, was when Maddie Graham put the fear of God into Will’s mean guidance counselor Mr. Martin. The monotone, white-haired, half-asleep seeming counselor had been convinced Will just didn't have the ability to pass basic math and would therefore never make it to college. Maddie made sure that when the meeting was over, arrangements had been made for extra tutoring help for a triumphant-looking Will, and that Martin would

think twice the next time he tried to give himself a mood boost by making a teenager feel terrible about their future prospects.

Uncle Robertus, as far as Will could see, was definite Mr. Martin personality type. He needed a good old dose of what Maddie could bring, literally, to the table.

“Mr. and Mrs. Graham,” Hannibal said with pleased surprise, enchanted as if the fire department, ambulance and police had arrived when he was about to burn alive in a locked house.

Will’s heart squeezed at the way his fiance looked at his parents, as if he trusted them so completely in this almost childlike way. Anyone could be forgiven, just for a moment, in forgetting that Hannibal was a distinguished, fifty year old psychiatrist who moonlit as a vicious cannibalistic serial killer. He just looked so purely grateful.

“I’m surprised and delighted you’re here. Please--” Hannibal stood quickly, buttoned his jacket automatically, always the gentleman, and pulled out seats at the long table lavishly spread out with the extravagant dinner.

“Thank you, Hannibal,” Maddie smiled. She hugged him and Travis shook his hand, then they sat down.

Robertus looked at the Grahams like two aliens had just pulled up chairs at the table, green skin, antennae and all. Will almost let out a laugh but caught himself in time, clearing his throat.

“Grand Duke Robertus Lecter and Lady Murasaki Lecter, allow me to introduce my parents, Madeline and Travis Graham.”

“Madeline?” Travis repeated, blinking at his wife. “Your first name is--?”

She swatted his shoulder, rolled her eyes and shook hands across the table with the guests who had risen enough to complete the introductory gesture.

“Such a pleasure to *finally* meet you both,” Maddie continued with a smile laced in poison.

Will coughed to hide another laugh.

“We...have a great many obligations at home in Lithuania, between our royal duties and business concerns, many investments, real estate holdings and public appearances constantly requiring our attention. However, once we heard of Hannibal’s engagement to your son, we made a point of visiting.” Uncle Robertus delivered this speech slowly, as if he assumed the Grahams were equally the backwoods, idiotic specimens he had determined Will to be.

“I...see,” Maddie smirked.

She accepted a generous serving of red wine from Hannibal, who bowed to her and took his seat across from Will, mouthing “thank you” to his sweetheart. Will winked at him and Hannibal blushed a little, biting his lip.

The mood tables were turning, and Will's more dominating side was manifesting in a slightly distracting way at Hannibal's boy-with-a-crush attitude towards him. He'd deal with that later, to what extent he could without risking any noise (given the guests) or violating his careful decision not to be too rough until his fiance fully recovered from the kidnapping ordeal.

He must have been imagining that hint of weird, nostalgic chemistry between Hannibal and Murasaki earlier.

He turned his attention back to his mother, who was still leveling Robertus with her building-demolishing friendliness.

"And...from..what...you're...saying," Maddie drew her words out even slower than Robertus had, resulting in a preschool teacher tone. "The whole country of Lithuania would barely be able to function without you."

"That's quite true," Robertus retorted, annoyed.

"Not really," Murasaki laughed, "And I tell him that constantly, but do you think he listens? I wanted to go to San Tropez after the new year, but he's dead set on a business trip to Rome. We've been there countless times, and do you think I ever once saw a tourist attraction we weren't visiting as royals to shake hands and take photographs?"

"Sounds like you been wantin' to say *that* for a while," Travis chuckled, sipping his own wine. His attitude was more of the cinema patron enjoying a fun comedy; he knew what Maddie was up to.

"Have you?" Robertus looked at his wife, mildly surprised, but to Will's own surprise as if he cared.

"I...suppose I have." Murasaki slipped a strand of raven hair behind one ear, past a stunning diamond earring. "I have dropped hints that have grown increasingly overt with time, yet I do not seem to be heard on this subject."

"You are always welcome to do just as you please, my dear." Robertus sighed, finishing his potatoes despite his earlier claim they were dry.

He'd cleared his whole plate and now reached for seconds. Hannibal let him serve himself, unlike any other guest, where he'd be falling over himself not only to serve them on a level suiting a five star restaurant (but he was a count! Will still had to remind himself of this), plus giving a long, usually a bit trippy psychoanalyzing, philosophizing, pun-heavy explanation of the recipe and its historical origins, its impact on the human race and so on. Robertus received none of this and probably didn't even know what an insult it was coming from his nephew. It was almost as much of a "diss" as it Hannibal actually grabbed the serving fork and stuck it in his uncle's carotid.

"You sure never spare any effort on the grub," Travis observed, marveling at the amazing feast, "Looks fantastic. Of course, Will's texted us photos of your recipes, but this is really something to see in person."

“I keep telling him he should have a recipe Instagram,” Maddie put in, equally dazzled by the huge meal, which itself was a sort of decoration, gothic and foreboding, but always...yummy.

Hannibal could always be depended on for “dinner and a show” but this particular topic had brought up the reason why Will always procrastinated inviting his parents over for a meal cooked by his fiance. It nearly brought up Will’s lunch, too, except that he hadn’t eaten any, and his empty stomach had by now led to a headache, compounded by the realization that now struck him.

It hit Will belatedly that with all the drama over the Grand Duke, he’d neglected to think about the grand *roast*. Oh, God, no.

It was obviously one thing to feed human meat to anyone else, but not his parents, that was going too far and disturbed him nearly as much as it would turn their stomachs if they knew what was in the lovely, gleaming meat on the center platter.

“There’s plenty of food, and freshly made,” Hannibal was continuing, but that was because Will had never clarified this one point -- he’d meant to, but it had been quite an eventful few months since they met, and he hadn’t gotten around to clarifying every rule they would follow in the future. But as the Ripper’s glance briefly met his own, Hannibal instantly seemed to understand.

“Although the meat may not be to your taste, as I’ve used a sugar-bourbon glaze,” he added.

Maddie and Travis both didn’t care for that particular flavor and had mentioned it over Christmas dinner while chatting about marinades with Hannibal. Will sighed. Robertus and Murasaki were still giving each other passive-aggressive annoyed looks, hers accusing and his offended, and they didn’t correct their nephew on the sauce (actually burgundy). What a relief.

“Oh, we had KFC earlier, we’re stuffed,” Travis laughed, “But thank y’all so much for offerin’. I’ll see if I can make a little room for dessert.”

“You know I have something truly special,” Hannibal said with sparkling eyes.

He had gone to town fancying up a chocolate lava cake Will had bought from a nice local bakery the day before. The cake was now drizzled with dark chocolate syrup and Hannibal’s unbelievably good homemade whipped cream, crowned and surrounded with fresh raspberries.

“I’m so sorry to have become distracted,” Murasaki recovered, “I intended to state earlier what a delight it is to make your acquaintance, Mr. and Mrs. Graham.”

“Oh, the pleasure is all ours, I’m sure, your ladyship,” Maddie answered blithely. “Now tell me, whose hand were you shaking and who was taking your photograph while your nephew was being held captive by a deranged young woman and *my* son was going out of his mind scouring the earth for him?”

Will almost choked on his next bite of Cami au jus, and patted his throat, eyes going huge and bright. He whispered dramatically, "*Mom!*" and caught her wink at him with a smirk.

She finished her wine with a borderline rude noise of satisfaction, and Hannibal rushed to refill her glass, only too eager to accommodate her guidance counselor-destroying mode. He looked impressed, but Will thought *he ain't seen nothin' yet.*

Murasaki's jaw had dropped; Robertus was fuming again.

"Because your ward, Chiyoh was here the moment she heard about Hannibal's disappearance," Maddie added.

"Mmmhmm, that's right," Travis nodded. "You know, I like that girl. Quiet, but she knows a lot, cares a lot, too. We *did* wonder where y'all were at the time, even in the hospital when Hannibal was laid up on bed rest."

"Better things to do?" Maddie accused, her breezy tone going flatter, more deliberate, but she kept smiling.

"How dare you insinuate we neglected my nephew," Robertus stormed. He pointed at Will's parents, glowering at their unfazed expressions. "How dare you presume to pass comment, much less judgement on my family, my personal decisions regarding our--"

"Naw, how dare you say 'how dare you' to my wife?" Travis insisted, giving Robertus a warning look.

Hannibal was on Travis' previous page of enjoying the entertainment. Will bet he'd never seen his uncle and even his step-aunt put in their place so nimbly, with no shame or hesitation on Maddie's part. Will liked to think he'd learned from the best when it came to dealing with confrontation.

"In addition to which, Uncle, pointing is rude." Hannibal had returned to his own meal with increased enthusiasm, chewing his perfectly composed forkful of meat, potatoes and vegetables with a pleased look.

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By the time the chocolate lava cake was served, the arguing part of the evening was over. Robertus had merely made up some feeble excuse of being on a diplomatic trip to Australia, too far to quickly attempt to fly to his nephew's aid, too slow a return to allow for a hospital visit.

This was a new narrative which his wife did not vocally oppose, but Maddie noted Murasaki's disapproving, conflicted look.

"Maybe one of these days, you oughta stop enabling his bad behavior," she said to Murasaki, rising from her chair and taking her wine glass with her.

Murasaki blushed in what appeared to be a vast confusion of guilt and astonishment. "I-- that is, we, the...uhmm…"

Maddie walked to her side and lifted the other woman's wine glass, holding it up with an accommodating, forgiving smile. "More wine? Don't worry about it, nobody's perfect. At least you seem nice, and you must have saintly patience to put up with all…"

She glanced at Robertus, who was staring at her in yet more enraged disbelief, only hampered by his upbringing's insistence on being extra delicate towards ladies, in his urge to insult Maddie Graham in the way he so often degraded his nephew.

"...That," Maddie finished.

Murasaki sighed. "More wine would be wonderful, thank you, Mrs. Graham."

"Please call me Maddie," she replied, happily going to the elegant, tall glass decanter of ruby wine on the rolling side table by Hannibal's chair at the head of the table. "And you can call me Madeline, Bobby," she tossed amusedly to Robertus while refilling the wine glasses.

Hannibal watched his future mother-in-law with great interest. Travis let out a low whistle, impressed.

Robertus was caught in what for him had to be an unfortunate deadlock. He would not be permitted to stay if he gave Hannibal the anti-Will rant which he had arrived in Baltimore to deliver. Surely he would rather remain here in this elegant and comfortable home than lower himself to a mere American *hotel* , nor was he willing to cede high ground entirely to the newly engaged couple as yet.

Will saw the determined glimmer in his eyes, darker than Hannibal's and without their secret softness. He was still trying to think of a way to convince Hannibal not to marry the dreadful commoner from the wrong side of the tracks, probably marry him off to some Lithuanian duchess or whatever.

"I'm quite weary from our travels," the Grand Duke announced calmly, having carefully simmered down rather than respond to Maddie's good-natured attacks. "If you will all excuse me, I would like to adjourn for the evening. My dear?"

He lifted his elbow out to his wife in preparing to depart the room with this dry goodnight speech and his chocolate cake untried.

"I should like to stay for dessert," Murasaki replied, tense in the company of the Grahams, but not in any mood to go get in a bed next to her husband, who had behaved abominably since their arrival, even for him, Will was prepared to bet.

"As you prefer." Robertus gave a bow, stated the name of each other person in the room coldly, then left, going down the hall to his guest room.

Everyone sighed. "You really put up with that every day?" Travis marveled, staring at Murasaki.

"Why?" Maddie put in, perplexed.

“It is a long story, involving arranged and advantageous marriage between wealthy, influential dynasties, parental manipulation, and learning to accept what we cannot change, love whatever is good in our spouse who is often so...difficult.” Murasaki exchanged another subtly knowing look with Hannibal, and it was so heartfelt that for one moment Will half-expected him to cover her small, pretty hand with his own on the table.

Why did that idea bother him so much? Unless…

“Let’s get drunk,” Maddie proposed eagerly, to cut the tense mood and put Murasaki at ease. The Lady laughed amiably and joined Maddie for a couple more glasses of Hannibal’s amazingly delicious wine, but Will didn’t drink any more and neither did Hannibal.

They listened more than participated as Maddie and Murasaki got to know one another, giggling through stories of their families and marriages, until Travis yawned and stretched, indicating he was about to do as Murasaki had done earlier in the evening, and fall asleep right there at the table.

“Let me take this shameless lush home before she turns into a pumpkin,” Travis chortled, and they all said their goodnights over a slightly tipsy Maddie insisting she wasn’t even slightly tipsy.

Will walked his parents to their car, then came back in, cheeks flushed with cold and gears of his mind twisting in anxious theories. He paused in the doorway to the dining room, unseen by Hannibal and his step-aunt.

“I thank you again for your great generosity, Hannibal,” Murasaki declared softly, and she gave him a brief hug, tender with some strange energy that remained chaste, yet --

Will supposed if he was married to Robertus -- ew -- and had a nephew as charming and good-looking as Hannibal, he might have a little crush too, despite the weird and inappropriate nature of the connection given that Hannibal must have been little more than a child when they first met. But he wasn’t about to stand for much more of this, mostly because he couldn’t.

He was about to make some cute interrupting speech to add his own goodnight, assuming the attraction to be one-sided and accusing himself of misinterpreting Hannibal’s side of the meaningful glances that had him mildly bothered all night.

But he saw Hannibal do it again, this time so close to his step aunt and lightly pressing her upper arm, squeezing in a casual, again totally chaste gesture of “hang in there.”

“He’ll soon tire of this latest project, and perhaps then you might take that trip abroad with a friend, take the well-earned rest you deserve.” Hannibal’s voice was too low, too rumbly, laden with past emotion, not present, and more sympathy than anything past familial care, no lust but too much *specific* caring.

“I should take Madeline,” Murasaki grinned, wiping her eye where a few tears (of *what?* Why was she tearing up after hugging Hannibal, dammit?) “She would be a marvelous companion.”

“We should introduce you to our friend Beverly,” Will said, keeping his behavior entirely calm and friendly, saving what he had to say to Hannibal for Hannibal only. “She would be perfect for a fun girls’ trip, too. Bet she’d be more than up to it.”

His tired mood had burst into flames of wild intention, but nobody else would have guessed from his cheerful demeanor. Even Hannibal didn’t notice at first that Will was going out of his mind, but he would know soon enough.

The small talk continued only a few minutes more before they went their separate ways, Murasaki to a second guest room separate from Robertus, who was snoring so loudly Will thought the closed door was going to start shaking, but had not one shred of amusement to spare the concept.

Hannibal and Will joined hands and the older man smiled adoringly at his fiance, leading him to the master bedroom, where they went inside just as if it was another normal but unusually busy, tiresome day and night.

“Will, I truly cannot thank you enough for--” Hannibal began to enthuse on Will’s support in dealing with the surprise visit from his family, but before he could form another word, the door to the room was shoved shut and locked with a fierce twist.

Will slammed Hannibal into the door, pinning his wrists by his head, glaring at him hotly. “You’ve had sex with that woman.”

Chapter End Notes

I guess Hannibal's really in for it now huh?

These high walls

Chapter Notes

cw: Intense spanking and some more aggressive face-slapping than previously in this fic, but no one is really hurt.

If you're not into the rougher sex scenes, this might not be your cup of tea, but if you *are,* it's your lucky day ✨ That said, there is also a good amount of tooth-rotting fluff in this chapter. Hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal was the human personification of total shock. He froze in place for a few seconds, staring at his fiance, who had transformed into a deadly-jealous, obsessively demanding, beautiful monster.

“Answer me,” Will demanded coarsely.

“Will,” Hannibal tried to reason humbly, but moaned when Will bore down on him more aggressively, grabbed a handful of his silken hair and tugged it hard.

“I won’t tolerate any more lies or half-truths between us. I won’t tolerate *anything* between us, haven’t I made that clear?” Will demanded in a hoarse whisper that hit harder than a shout ever could.

“Yes,” Hannibal gasped, “But...my intimate relationship with Murasaki...it was many, many years ago.”

“Now we’re getting somewhere.” Will released him with a cold smile, then went to the dresser drawer where he kept his naughtier belongings.

When Hannibal saw the leather gloves, his knees buckled. “*Will,* --”

“You were perfectly content allowing me to act the part of a fool during this unexpected visit from your family, which I’ve graciously supported you through, being your good boy and a perfect host despite being tired and insulted by your uncle,” Will continued.

He sat on the crushed velvet, blue ottoman at the end of the bed and spread his legs, placed his glove hands almost casually over his knees, emanating an icy calm while his eyes pierced Hannibal’s very soul with quiet, firm accusations and the need for discipline.

“I would never attempt to make a fool of you, baby,” Hannibal insisted. He went to Will and hit his knees on the rug before his dark angel. “I simply did not know how to tell--”

Will yanked his hair again, forcing Hannibal's gaze up from where it had fallen submissively to his shiny black shoes. "Baby, please, I'm sorry," Hannibal begged.

He could hardly remember the time when he believed himself above such embarrassing whining pleas or kneeling at the feet of a lover...for Will, he might very well have found himself in this position the day he met him. There was no resisting, no respite behind barriers of confident unconcern, not with Will, not ever.

"I'm not your baby tonight," Will growled with tears shining in his eyes and a wicked, commanding smile playing about his lush lips. "You can call me *Sir.*"

The sound that left Hannibal's throat was obscene. "Yes, Sir."

Will let his hair go. The silvery locks were hopelessly disheveled. And the angry boy hit his Daddy's face lightly on both sides, hissing out an annoyed "Shhhh! Don't forget, we have guests, Hannibal, and this isn't for them. It isn't for *her* to listen to. It's for *us.* Are you for me?"

Hannibal nodded desperately, fingers finding sweaty purchase on the ottoman to either side of Will's thighs. "Yes, Sir."

"When did you sleep with your aunt?" Will demanded, infuriated, jealous, high on his domination and eager for punishing Hannibal, he was dangerous and perfect.

Hannibal huffed an irritated laugh of his own. "She's not my biological--"

Will slapped his face again, then grabbed his jaw, scowled at him, pretty curls lavished over his brow. He was sexier than the most breath-taking male model in a luxury suit ad, stricter than the most unreasonable boss, and Hannibal could barely form words, torn between so many different feelings all in danger of submersion into defenseless lust. If Will did not believe he was taking this seriously, it would make him perhaps irretrievably enraged with his fiance.

"Oh, you're not related and that makes it okay? It's twisted and you know it. The way she still looks at you, so wistfully, and you let her, and you let me sit there and watch, not knowing what it means. How fucking dare you, Hannibal?"

"It is you who are twisting the situation to cast me as villain. I know you do not truly believe me capable of such behavior, of flirting openly with a former lover to torment you, of concealing some unresolved affair out of some selfish ulterior motive. Are you even interested in the truth, or merely blowing the matter so wildly out of proportion that you justify your anger and jealousy?"

Hannibal's words spilled recklessly from his mouth. He remained pliantly positioned, obviously open and receptive to his punishment, worshipful of his beautiful Sir, but never willing to accept unwarranted accusations.

"You have the audacity to give me sassy answers when I'm this mad?" Will's scowl darkened along with his wanton gaze. "Get your fucking clothes off --"

Memories of their very first night together flowed through Hannibal on a wave of unstoppable arousal, Will's voice ordering him to undress, his own immediate obedience, when he had never allowed anyone to speak to him in that bossy and owning manner before. Discovering it was all he ever wanted or needed, to have Will in charge, doing with Hannibal just what he pleased, and his own ability to give in -- he could still taste that night and wanted more of the same, especially given the weeks he'd been deprived of it.

Yet this mood of Will's did not promise the ecstatic worship Hannibal had received that night, more an incessant and harsh raining down of the younger man's expertly bestowed punishment. He was no less excited, commencing at once to remove each complicated piece of his fine three-piece suit, neatly folding each item once it was off, until beside Will on the bench there was a stack of plaid, beneath the bench his Italian designer dress shoes and his socks, carefully rolled and placed inside. This was no time for a striptease, but rather a dutiful carrying out of Will's commands.

When he was entirely naked, his rigid cock standing to attention and dripping with desire, his nipples hard amidst his forest of scratchy-soft chest hair, his breathing rapid and distracted, chest and stomach rising and falling so fast, Will looked him over, his usual praising approval of Daddy's strong, manly physique, Daddy's superb, always ready desire to go all out to please him replaced with a withering glare, as though these things now offended him.

"Over my knee," Will ordered, flint in his tone, and Hannibal struggled slightly to arrange himself properly on the ottoman which was really too small for such a purpose, and had likely been chosen for this exact reason. Hannibal would face challenges at every turn; Will wasn't going easy on him anymore.

Will had finally gotten over the hump of his trauma-induced extra solicitude about gentleness with Hannibal; molten rage had shoved him over it and back into his normal state of mind, wherein he trusted himself to make the decisions of how and when discipline and structure were used to teach his lover right from wrong between them. While somewhat regretful he had wounded Will's feelings, Hannibal was glad to see him feeling more like himself again, as despite the anger it was ultimately healthier than trying to coddle a perfectly healthy man every day, as if Hannibal was still an invalid.

"Get your act together, Daddy, or this is going to be a lot harder on you." Will grabbed Hannibal and arranged the bigger man roughly over his lap. Hannibal's chin dug into one corner of the bench while his long legs extended awkwardly quite some ways over the furthest edge. Gravity would roll him to the floor if his self control or Will's vice grip lightened up even a little.

"I'm sorry, baby -- Sir!" Hannibal blushed and avoided the urge to begin grinding his erection into the firm muscle of curvy thigh beneath him, turned on immensely by the scenario and Will's remaining fully clothed in such a handsome, sophisticated suit while he was fully nude and at his darling's bitter mercy.

Two biological impulses happened to Will, natural as breathing, the moment he laid his gloved hand on one of Hannibal's plush ass cheeks and gave a first squeeze. Will's own cock filled, hard against Hannibal's side and making the older man moan softly; and the boy let out a long sigh of relief. The tactile sensuality of getting his hands all over Hannibal's ass, the

exquisite intimacy between them, brought him comfort, even as his temper raged on. Hannibal loved that Will's adoration for his body and their closeness could not be hampered even by his own mistakes and Will's anger. He could never hide wanting Hannibal.

"See how you turn me on, Daddy? Do you know how angry it makes me, being so completely natural and clear with you, while you hide secrets?" Will squeezed the supple skin painfully harder, digging his nails in just a bit, enough to make Hannibal's cock stiffen to an acute hardness that felt uncomfortably intense.

He bit his lip to keep from crying out in joy at the gift Will gave him after the deprivation, all that excruciating, kind tenderness without the flashes of pain he needed to make the former remotely acceptable into his vulnerable heart.

"It happened the summer I turned eighteen," Hannibal answered, but his attempt to rewind the conversation to before his "sass," while intended as a show of better conduct, only served to stoke Will's fire.

A long silence followed. Hannibal stared over his shoulder, hurting his neck in the pathetic need to look at his angel, to know Will's thoughts. Will sat quite formally, his hand in smooth leather gliding back and forth over Hannibal's ass, and his face seemed momentarily resigned, nearly accepting.

Hannibal, who was shaking from head to toe and could not begin to control it, as staying in place was all he could manage, only had a warning from Will's sarcastic glare and his grim reply, laced in more false, nearly mocking calm, "Oh. Is that so?"

His boy pulled his hand back, the black leather shining under the soft glint of warm lamplight, and brought it down with full force on Hannibal's ass. "Must have been quite a summer."

Will began spanking him nonstop, not giving a single moment's hesitation to let Hannibal recover from each individual blow. The curves of his ass shook and reddened quickly, and he couldn't look at Will because the pleasure of the discipline nearly made him tumble to the floor. He threw every ounce of his effort into staying put, anchored by stubbornness and Will's harsh, binding, painful grip on one of his hips while he continuously pummeled his fiance's ass with blow after blow.

He alternated precisely between force levels, changing from a few softer slaps to medium strength and then full-on harshness, emboldened by Hannibal's breathy sighs which soon rose to audible moans and whimpers.

"You're getting louder, Daddy, do you need something to bite down on? Too loud. I'm -- not done," Will said breathlessly, and Hannibal shook his head, covering his own mouth with one trembling hand while with the other he used a touch on the floor to try and keep himself steadily positioned.

He could smell Will's desire, the shock of sweet heat, the heady way the expensive cologne from Daddy blended with the sweat of his labor, and when Will had to stop to catch his own

breath, he clutched Hannibal's ass and dug his nails in again on a particularly raised red mark that would become an absolute welt soon if he kept on spanking.

"Sir, sir, please. It hurts," Hannibal whined huskily, lowering his hand from his lips.

Will's gloved hand landed heavily, with sloppy caresses and tugs, in Hannibal's sweaty hair, and he took a moment to fully enjoy the redness of the older man's face, the tears streaming down it, his gorgeous submission and how well he took his punishment.

"I'd be more pleased with you for being good during this," Will hissed under his breath, "if I did not know all too well that you fucking *love* pain from me, and it's hardly a punishment for you. I'm doing this for me, because if I don't feel you give into me beyond any meager hope of hiding your truth, I don't know what I'll do. I'm so goddamn infuriated and hurt -- tell me about that summer. You and Murasaki."

"Will, it doesn't matter. It was a foolish and naive, youthful fling. Nothing compared with how I feel for--"

Will growled again, feral-sounding, never lovelier. "Get on the bed and be quick about it."

Another challenge. Hannibal was aching from head to toe, firstly his muscles were stiff from maintaining the impossible posture for nearly fifteen minutes now, and secondly, his ass stung and smarted, covered in Will's fingerprints, scratch marks and handprints. Finally, he was still alarmingly hard and unable to do anything to relieve the oversensitive, helpless nature of his state. Still, he managed to peel himself off the boy with a low cry of pain as his muscles cried out and his ass hurt, his ego starting to take in the pain of Will's accusations and doubts, annoyance growing in him to accompany his willing submission; it was too confusing and he swore copiously under his breath, finally managing to flop onto the bed unceremoniously, landing on his stomach and enjoying a very brief rest.

Seconds later Will was on him, muttering into his ear from behind while he pressed his hard cock under suit trousers right between Hannibal's ass cheeks and groaned, eyes rolling up in pleasure. "Fuck. Listen, I may not be able to help wanting you even at your very worst and most selfish, but don't think I won't find a way to get you open for me in many, many ways, whether you particularly feel like it or not. This youthful fling. How long did it last?"

"A -- few weeks," Hannibal sputtered, weak with desire as Will rubbed against him rhythmically, offering no affectionate touch to supplement the rutting. "Will, please -- Sir, Sir, I need…"

"Yes, Daddy?" Will poured his body over Hannibal's, more weight sinking down, and rode him some more, the pants rubbing against his huge erection in a way that had to be getting unmanageable. It felt like he was fucking the marks he'd left on Hannibal's skin, and the older man moaned his reply, already humiliated by the next words before they went flying out of his mouth without his meaning to be anything like this needy.

"Fuck me, Sir, I need your big cock inside me. Take it all out on me, make me your object, your possession, possess me," Hannibal panted, reaching a large hand back to grasp Will's thigh and encourage his grinding.

Will slapped his hand away with a bitter, short laugh. “I bet you’d like that, huh? Greedy thing. So pretty when you’re desperate, though. I’ll tell you what, finish answering my questions and maybe I’ll let you choke on my cock until you almost black out.”

“Please, please, yes,” Hannibal begged, “Anything.” His fingers numbly gripped the bedding, and Will rose from his commanding, blanketing position over him to take off his pants. He slid off his dress shirt, too, then the tie and his expensive gold watch, every inch the sex god of Hannibal’s raunchiest fantasies.

Naked and astoundingly erect, Will gave himself a few pumps from his hand for relief, standing beside the bed as Hannibal lay where he was left and stared hungrily.

“You want this huh? Better answer every single question, then,” Will bit out, snarling as the pleasure of his own touch made him wetter.

“Yes, Sir.” Hannibal’s mouth watered; shivers ran up and down his spine as he went on staring at his boy, who masturbated shamelessly in front of him.

“Was she your first?” Will stopped stroking, let go of himself and stood there stonily waiting, his cock bulging, nipples hard and eyes feverishly *upset.*

“Will...it is not import--”

“I fucking asked if she was your first.” Will tumbled Hannibal over to his back and climbed on top, straddling his hips, so that his engorged dick slid up and down his fiancee’s hairy belly, leaving trickles of sticky precum that eased the glide of his grinding. Then, when Hannibal remained silent, staring at the ceiling over Will’s shoulder and pressing his lips together to curb moans that would have been wall-shaking, Will changed position and got face to face over him. He kneeled over Hannibal and held his wrists down again, just barely letting his cock touch and briefly rub the man beneath him.

“Did she take your virginity? And were you so very grateful she was your first?”

“She...was my first,” Hannibal admitted raggedly, “But Sir--”

“Did you love her?” Will choked him hard and slapped his face, rage flashing in his eyes, “Did you tell her you loved her when you fucked her behind your uncle’s back for *several weeks?*”

“I did not tell her,” Hannibal answered, letting go of his reserve and resistance one hundred percent, the last vestige of it being his own indignance at the line of invasive questioning, Will’s refusal to trust his own discretion as to when certain past truths were divulged, his immature and smothering insistence on complete disclosure, or else.

“But at the time, I did believe I loved her in that way.”

Will nodded. “Very good, Daddy,” he said, clearly pleased by Hannibal’s entire honesty even when the words hurt him. He swallowed hard, a burn in his eyes that scalded Hannibal’s perception. “Do you love her that way now?”

“Of course not,” Hannibal said with a soothing smile.

Sir was still his baby, after all, but he would not test Will’s endearing temper by making any such observation aloud. How he adored his tumultuous boy.

“I only love you, Sir.” He was naked as if stripped to barest bone and muscle sinew, as if his lifeblood soaked the bed under the knife that was Will. “For decades, the relationship between Murasaki and myself has been entirely platonic. Based on mutual respect but no thought beyond.”

“I told you all about my first time, underwhelming though it was,” Will replied, barely a thought to spare for the tryst with Beth Ann from Chem class under a full moon and a blanket in the back of his friend’s pick up truck, one dark night in an otherwise abandoned field.

He *had* told Hannibal the tale one evening early in their own dating, by way of illustrating how sex had always been empty for him in the past, had always disappointed him in his yearning for true passion. Something far beyond the convenient and temporary merging of compatible bodies in stress-relieving, distracting quickies.

“But you never once breathed a word to me about this. And I *waited* for you to tell me. Your first time. Why did you hold it back -- was it that special to you, the memory -- was, is *she* that special? Unique in your eyes and to your heart, a precious nostalgia, never to be regained, but pined for because of its...very impossibility?”

“No.” Hannibal smiled tearfully up at Will, not reaching to brush the boy’s pretty tears, as he had not been given permission to touch. But instead, letting them fall onto his burning skin, cooling and saddening in equal measure.

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A beautiful thing to watch unfolding before amazed and widening eyes, the melancholy confusion of this stunning creature’s jealousy.

In this moment, Will was clay in Hannibal's artist hands, as much as he had become a canvas under his lover’s brush, learning new depths and colors, surrendering his originality to the inundating force of love which would have its own way and break down old resistances.

He would hurt Will’s feelings on purpose regularly to gaze upon such wondrous, heart-swelling sadness, but he knew he could never stand to do such a thing to his lover, even at his own most sadistic breaking points. For he could only bear to see Will’s lovely sadness for a short time before the insuperable urge to put a smile back on that endearing, incomparable face would overpower him, defeat his cruelty, remake *him* for Will.

To remake in one’s own image, change roles until one fit properly to the pains and yearnings of the heart; perhaps this was how God felt. Hannibal identified with God when he killed, but here, where he worshipped, bedded ruthlessly by Will, he did the same; he was God and Lucifer, so was Will; each of them the site and prayer within the holy rites, profane and encompassing.

Re-creation always required some breaking. As with all their previous lover's quarrels, the bones would pop into place and they both would form new shapes to face a fresh day.

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"If that's true, how come you never told me about your affair with Murasaki?" Will frowned, growing petulant now.

Hannibal's patience blossomed. He was not the one being bratty in this scenario, being unreasonable, even if it had been wrong to withhold this fact about himself from his fiance for so long. Still, Will's adorable and precious sulking was its own glittering treasure, and his fingers itched so badly to touch him that he dug his fingers into the sheets, feeling every inch of his skin was far, far too sensitive; a mere breath from Will could make him quiver in bliss.

"It was not a pleasant time in my life, those years spent in my uncle's house. Robertus neglected to adopt me until I was of an age to be more manageable, no longer the...

the near-feral grief-stricken waif whom the police found shivering and blood-splattered in the snow, eight years old, orphaned, an only child.. "Young children have tempers to manage, flights of fancy. He waited until the foster system wrung those from me."

"Hannibal," Will's face crumpled into sympathy and he stroked Hannibal's face, allowing his lover to lean into the touch.

"Allow me to elucidate; it won't take much longer." Hannibal's lashes were dotted in celestial tears, and he licked more from his lips, some tears his own and some Will's. "I was very alone in that place even after he condescended to take me in; I was equally alone at school even while rising to the top of the heap in popularity, grades, college prospects. That was effortless to me, but to fill the hole in my heart far more difficult.

When Robertus brought home a new wife, my dream was merely to have a compatriot within the cold walls that seemed to be made of echoes and the long, yawning halls of the mansion. But my journey to manhood was nearly complete that summer when she came and graced the colorless place with her beauty. I became infatuated. My uncle was seldom home and his neglect disappointed Murasaki deeply, crushing her own youthful dreams of romance. There were but seven years between us in age; twenty between her and my Uncle.

The night I came of age, now Robertus' heir to his reluctant necessity, compelled by bloodline but no prideful affection, he provided me a shining new car but no cake, no family dinner or further jubilation. I was an afterthought to everyone but my school friends, whom I treated as sporadically interesting pawns on my chessboard, and Murasaki. The friends gave me a wild party which raged on past the following dawn. I had embarrassed myself that afternoon by attempting to seduce someone I thought I...they did not want me, and I reeled with the rejection. Then, when I went home to the empty-hearted place Murasaki and I were all alone together.

She was lonely and confused; I, lost in some anguish which had by this time become untouchable even to myself, therefore unbreakable. Afterwards, Murasaki was more reluctant to resume our stolen moments, even as her ordeal in the new marriage weakened her

resistance to my youthful yet vigorous approach. Finally, she ended the affair and we both vowed to pretend it had never occurred. It was for all of our good, and it has been. In truth, I never think of those nights and days with her anymore, fleeting and ultimately fruitless as the impetuous, baffled infatuation was."

Will had listened, alternatively nodding in empathetic commiseration with the teenaged Hannibal's struggles, and darkening into possessive flinches when Hannibal spoke of his past attraction and responsiveness to his beautiful step-aunt's presence.

"I was your first, too," he said, choking the words out, swallowing again, painfully this time. He was still hard, his body warm and strong, pressing into Hannibal.

"Yes." Hannibal stared at him breathlessly, wrists giving into the tight hold Will had on him, thrusting him deeper into the mattress. "Will, look at me. You were my *first.*"

Will collapsed against him with a feral moan deep in his throat. He kissed Hannibal with filthy abandon, swiping his tongue against Hannibal's own with messy greed, rolling and rocking his hips, grinding his cock against Hannibal's hip and thigh, grunting between hard, commanding kisses.

"Lay there and be good. You've earned your reward," Will muttered, grabbing the headboard and thrusting his cock into Hannibal's warm, slick mouth, fucking his face over and over, the rough treatment making the older man's hand fly automatically to his own erection.

"No," Will ordered gruffly, close now.

Will went on thrusting, deeper, his weeping dick gliding now to the back of Hannibal's throat, making his fiance choke and gasp, big, vein-lined hands reaching to grab Will's hips and force him in even deeper, harder. He forced himself to stop and remain compliant with the boy's every whim, remaining still save for his body tremors while Will spilled down his throat and grunted his name three times, riding out the pleasure until Hannibal was on the edge of unconsciousness, his vision blurred.

Hannibal gasped for air when Will finally withdrew from his swollen lips with a shivering moan of regret, needing more.

"Don't you ever forget," Will said, still shuddering in pleasurable afterglow, sinking further down the bed and shoving Hannibal's legs up over his shoulders. He licked at Hannibal's entrance, groaning in enjoyment, then lapped with relentless skill while Hannibal writhed above him, toes twitching, cock stiff and balls tightening; he would come from this if Will did not slow down --

"Suck," Will ordered, giving Hannibal several of his fingers, coated in leather and sin, to lick and suck indulgently.

"I was your first," Will added, then sliding a finger into the hole he'd relaxed somewhat with his rimming, swearing low under his breath at the tight heat hugging him and drawing him in.

“Yes!” Another urgent whisper, hiding his brightly manifested pleasure and desperation from the sleeping guests in the rooms downstairs.

“God, Hannibal, you’re always so damn tight.” Will’s cock twitched back to thick, dripping alertness that easily, and he began slowly finger-fucking his lover, mixing Hannibal’s keening, raspy cries of building euphoria with his own cursing and praising. “Fucking *beautiful*. Heavenly, and all for me. Tight as the first time, even after...I’ve fucked you so many times, still…” Will added a second finger and thrust harder, faster, slick with saliva, finding Hannibal’s sweet spot and fucking with breathtaking twists and slams, a slapping sound growing louder as his third finger sank to the hilt and a few more fast glides brought Hannibal to a full-body convulsion, his body squeezing tighter on Will’s fingers, pleasure searing through him, his breath the only way he had to show his astonished outpouring of ecstasy.

“Ahh,” He cried softly, shivering now so hard that Will soothed him.

“Shh, it’s okay, Daddy. Do you like that I was your first?”

“Yes, Sir. I *love* it. P-please, couldn’t...can I touch you now?”

“Well, alright, then,” Will relented, smiling, leaning over Hannibal’s pleasure-weak body and kissing both of his flushed cheeks, then his lips, slow and sweet, “Tell me why I put on the gloves.”

“I didn’t deserve your bare hands. I had hurt you too much with my lie of omission. I am so truly sorry, my dear.”

“Yes. You are.” Will angled his face and gave Daddy another strongly rebuking, dark smirk, brows lifted in appraisal. “You’re very sorry and you’ll never lie again. Tell me.”

“I’m very sorry, Sir, and I will never, ever lie to you again.”

“Turn over and present,” Will insisted, and when Hannibal complied as swiftly as might be managed on such tingling limbs, Will gave his ass a swift but more playful spanking, reigniting the woulds from earlier, nails all the while cascading down Hannibal’s back, the small spark of pain like an ice cube on his spine.

Hannibal let out a tirade in various languages that impressed Will as he slicked his hard-on between his lover’s ass cheeks and sank slowly into him, hands free until his hips met Hannibal’s skin and he whispered, “*Fuck. So good.* You want it, nice and hard, Daddy?”

“Yes, please, Sir.”

“Do you want me to take the gloves off now, since you’ve done your penance by telling me the truth?”

Hannibal smiled back at him, loving the way his body held Will inside, clinging, claimed. He wished they could stay just like this forever.

“No,” he answered, “Please don’t take them off.”

“You and these fucking gloves, Daddy.” Will accused him in amusement that quickly shifted into building pleasure and panting, his fingers digging into Hannibal’s hips. This wasn’t a night for drawing matters out, not with what they both needed from each other *now,* all patience forgotten. “It’s so hard to punish you when you like all the things I use to make you pay -- goddamn,” he grunted, distracted by bliss as he thrust in, hitting Hannibal’s prostate with no hesitation, his own pleasure getting harder to resist. He could think himself to orgasm at the mere idea of being inside his handsome Daddy, yet Will always preferred the lusty, ferocious reality.

“I’m sorry,” Hannibal lied, making Will scoff and spank him again, then squeeze his ass, groping when his orgasm hit and made his hips shudder roughly against him, obscene slap of skin on skin and the joined, naughty scents of their cum making him even wilder. Despite their passionate excess, both remained focused on staying quiet, and succeeded, grasping each other and the bedding for support in the unbearable delight.

"I'm not counting that as a lie since I know you were kidding," Will breathed out heatedly, humor and lust fused inextricably.

“Mylimasis,” Hannibal moaned, giving into his own second orgasm as Will decorated his ass with some of his seed, then pushed it back inside him with a possessive growl. The sheets were sticky-sweet and tangled all over their naked bodies, soon even more tangled as the men grappled together in a near-violence of rough kisses full of tongue and teeth, over and over, caring nothing for the mess except that it sealed them closer together.

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“Feeling better, honey?” Will asked attentively when his long process of aftercare had been completed and Hannibal lounged sleepily in his arms.

“Yes.” Hannibal kissed the back of Will’s hand. He looked up at his boy with languorous but always worshipful chocolate eyes. “And you?”

“Much better.”

Will sat up against the propping pillows in their fresh cases against the headboard, which was certainly to be applauded for surviving the way he had grabbed it nearly right out of its fixings while fucking into Hannibal’s mouth earlier.

In his Corgi patterned pajamas, with his curls still damp from their bath, his cheeks charmingly rose-tinted in pleasant warmth of snuggles that followed, Will was so domestic in this moment. Nearly impossible to match up with the fierce, angry lover from a mere hour previous. Both sides of Will, equally irresistible, treasured in Hannibal’s memory palace, to be sketched over and over with dissatisfying results that never made him give up on properly capturing the beauty and emotion of these times with Will, the way Will *looked.*

Hannibal slumped merrily against his fiance, face resting on Will’s low chest, his own arm wound with lazy contentment around Will’s waist. He had on his nicest red silk pajama set from Christmas and his warm feet were bare, legs curled up towards Will’s, their position a nonsensical result of drowsy clinginess.

Will giggled fondly, straightened his posture and gathered Hannibal properly in a snug embrace, Hannibal's back to his chest and stomach, Will's arms criss-crossed over his fiance. Hannibal tried to nestle his feet into Will's but his legs were too long, so he stretched them out with a cat like yawn, tipping his face back for a kiss.

Thanks to a careful application of healing salves, Hannibal's bottom, sitting on the soft blankets, felt reasonably taken care of given that he had been so well...taken care of by Will during his disciplining.

"You're so smooth in your silky pj's, Daddy," Will laughed softly again, so very soft in his love, kissing Hannibal's ear and ruffling his damp hair. "They suit you just right."

"Well, since one cannot wear a three piece suit to bed," Hannibal mused wryly.

"Gotta feeling you'd rather wear me to bed any night." Will's Southern drawl came out more now he was tired, lighting up Hannibal's senses as always.

"True, my love."

"Hannibal?"

"Mmm?"

"I should have trusted you. Much as we both like these games, the part of it that was me being plain unreasonable...I regret. These are tough times to make you remember, and it makes me feel guilty for losing my temper and dragging it out of you."

"I understand. In your position, I don't know that I would have remained any more composed until I knew the truth you were hiding."

"Because you don't mind doesn't make it okay. I...from now on, I'm trusting you one hundred. It's not that I won't still have my days. Or hate anyone who looks at you with that kind of want. But I won't let it blind me to who you are and the devotion you give me. That's all over now. You've..healed me somehow, from that doubt. I know you're mine. Do you know I'm yours?"

"My Will. Yes, I know it. Thank you for your honesty. And since we are on the subject, you do understand you cannot murder my aunt."

"Fine. Your uncle?" Will ventured, trying not to break poker face when Hannibal's eyes opened to shoot him a *no* look.

"Fine, fine. I guess you're entitled to hold onto your family even when they let you down or make me want to strangle them. Gotta be a line somewhere."

"Precisely. There are not so many Lecters left that we have some to spare on our righteous or merely possessive fits of temper."

Another yawn. Will's hands caressed him all over, massaging his arms, his chest and abdomen, and his kisses were honeyed syrup on bath-warmed skin.

And Hannibal looked up at him, shyly this time. “Sing me to sleep?”

“You want a lullabye?” Will squinted at him through his own heavy eyelids, watching Hannibal’s emphatic nod.

“I love the sound of your voice, and your singing. I deeply enjoyed you singing to me that night in the hospital, after I described my dream. We’re not in the car or at that wretched, nonetheless enjoyable den of karaoke. Can I hear you singing to me, all the same?”

“Hmm, alright, alright, only because you’re so adorable. And I like the way I’m the only one who can make your face turn that particular color.”

Hannibal accepted this cheerfully. Asking for a lullabye had required him to reveal the vulnerable way he felt when he heard Will singing. It was worth it.

“Let’s see, a suitable lullabye for the spoiled, cute, sleepy Daddy...my future husband and the terror of the Chesapeake…”

“If you don’t carry on with it soon, I’ll fall asleep and miss it,” Hannibal complained teasingly.

“Uptown girl,” Will crooned immediately, with great enthusiasm and a fair vocal performance given his earlier exertions. “She’s been living in her uptown world, I bet she never had a downtown guy --”

“Absurd,” Hannibal snorted, “Of all song choices, really--”

“Do you want your lullabye or not?”

“Very well.”

“Just listen,” Will smirked, kissing Hannibal’s cheek, his jaw, closing his eyes and swaying slightly back and forth as though they were dancing, half in a dream.

“*I'm gonna try for an uptown girl*
She's been living in her white-bread world
As long as anyone with hot blood can
And now she's looking for a downtown man
That's what I am--”

“Are you indeed?” Hannibal chuckled, starting to get more immersed in the performance.

“Didn’t I just prove it, now shhh. *And when she knows what she wants from her ti-i-ime*
And when she wakes up and makes up her mi-i-ind
She'll see I'm not so tough
Just because
I'm in love with an uptown girl…”

“I like that bit,” Hannibal admitted, petted and content as could be.

“Thought you would,” Will answered proudly before finishing the song with the same devoted performance, not loud enough to wake the guests, but infinitely sensuous despite the humorous theme, his Louisiana sunshine drawl and slight rasp in his tone sending Hannibal where he needed to go.

“Encore,” Hannibal begged, and Will groaned. “A more respectful subject this time, perhaps.”

“Oh, yeah?” Will quirked his brows. “I think you heard the romance in that number plain enough.”

“That I did, thank you, mylimasis. I am happy to be your ‘uptown girl,’ if you insist.”

“And I do. Now let’s see, another song...for...you…” Will’s smirk grew into an evil grin.

“*Well, you went uptown riding in your limousine / With your fine Park Avenue clothes,*” Will began, crowing the words out with a decent imitation of Billy Joel’s delivery, and Hannibal cried foul all at once.

“Will! Really!”

”Because you had to be a big shot, didn’t ya,
You had to open up your mouth
You had to be a big shot, didn't you
All your friends were so knocked out
You had to have the last word, last night
know what everything's about
You had to have the white hot spotlight
You had to be a big shot last night, oooohhhhhh!”

“I admit I do enjoy ‘the white hot spotlight’ as well as being…’a big shot,’” Hannibal chortled when Will was done.

He gave a meager bit of applause until Will tickled his belly, and then he clapped a little more sincerely, rolling his eyes.

“I will listen to you sing anything at all, blissfully, even the dictionary.” Hannibal’s adoring expression and ability to bear Will’s gentle humor so well seemed to touch the younger man’s heart and put him in a more tender mood, softening his smile again.

“One more song,” Will promised, “And this time, you’re going to sleep. You need your rest.”

Hannibal nodded and snuggled in even closer, holding onto Will’s arms encircling him. The vibrations of Will’s voice and the quickening of his heartbeat were clear to feel against him even through their clothes.

“*Drink up baby, look at the stars*
I'll kiss you again, between the bars

Where I'm seeing you there with your hands in the air
Waiting to finally be caught…"

Hannibal smiled into approaching heavy slumber. He still could picture and feel that night when he first heard Will sing him that song in the car, not sure yet the words were for him. That uncertainty was now so far away, but the fragility palpable in Will's husky singing.

"*Drink up one more time, and I'll make you mine*
Keep you apart, deep in my heart
Separate from the rest, where I like you the best
And keep the things you forgot
People you've been before
That you don't want around anymore
That push and shove and won't bend to your will
I'll keep them still…"

I know you will. Hannibal slipped into sleep like drifting into the deepest, most welcoming ocean, fathomless and safe.

Chapter End Notes

Next up: We're going on a journey somewhere...we haven't been before. 🤔🙊

I have now clearly envisioned the remaining chapters. While I've known for a while what happens, it was more a question of splitting it into chapters that flow well. There are four regular chapters and an epilogue. After 400+ pages (!!) in a fic I originally thought might be 10-15 chapters, it's surreal to have the end so close in sight!

Total eclipse of the heart

Chapter Notes

> These next two chapters take us to some disillusioning experiences in Hannibal and Will's young adulthoods. There are a few key elements in each story that will come up again in our present time storyline, in ways I hope you will enjoy as much as I have enjoyed planning it! So -- some melancholy times for young Hannibal and young Will, but it's coming full circle with a *very* happy resolution when we go back to our besotted fiances. ❤️
>
> cw for this chapter: smoking, drug use references, brief and non-graphic description of Hannibal's fling with Murasaki.

Part Five: What must it be like to grow up that beautiful?

Lithuania, Summer of 1983

The party was boring and Hannibal despised his own inability to see it otherwise. His supposed best friend, Darius, head boy at their posh prep school, had promised to throw Hannibal the bash of the century to celebrate his eighteenth birthday, and it was certainly an immense event.

The entire school had come out, and the boundaries of many cliques dissolved as the liquor, drugs and loud dance music poured freely. In Darius' parents house, available since they were off on holiday, the dancefloor teemed with secondary students flinging themselves into the month of June via intense hedonism that somehow, mysteriously felt utterly flavorless to him. Excess did not entertain. Not this evening. A disappointment.

Lasers crisscrossed from the rented light system throbbing in time with the generic, grating hit pop songs. Everything seemed to be pulsing in neon and he was lapsed within shadows, standing out and mismatched to the atmosphere, a gothic Hamlet crossly and obsessively committed to pessimism.

Hannibal stood gloomily off to one side of the dance floor, a shot of chilled vodka absent-mindedly dangling from his fingers, nails dabbed in shining black polish, his family's crest ring heavy on his hand. As usual, he wore all black, a plain t-shirt under a fashionably boxy blazer and tight leather pants. He was the epitome of studied cool. Not caring how he was perceived or if anyone even noticed him at his own "epic bash" contributed to his air of ineffable, elegant snobbery and he knew it.

This was one of his only comforts at present, that he was pleased with the version of himself he gave the world tonight, cold, untouchably perfect, intimidating, a quiet threat to anyone

who got too close. But there would always be those drawn to danger, moths to his proverbial flame.

“I thought I recognized those cheekbones,” said Tamara, a girl in Hannibal’s year with a sky-high blonde side ponytail, impressive from a scientific perspective as to the gravity and hairspray that made it possible.

Her eyes were a pretty ocean blue, but she smelled of too much Giorgio for Women and Hannibal could never stand to have his sensitive olfactory perception inundated with common, therefore tacky, fragrances in excess. And Tamara had chosen the wrong night to experiment with her proclivity towards the “bad boys.”

He simply wasn’t interested, barely looked at her as he finished his shot and slid it across the bar where it clinked with a light, musical, crystalline sound against his previous glass.

“Well, aren’t you dancing? It’s your birthday, Hannibal, cheer up!” She had certainly partaken in the cocaine lines which had been hospitably provided beside the enormous birthday cake.

I’m not dancing because I don’t know any of you and none of you care about me in the least. You wish to show fealty to my wealth and style, my power in this world. Lacking the energy for the show tonight, I would prefer to shoot down that chandelier with the sharp studs and watch it smash into the first few of you dancing underneath its shimmering lights. And if I hear Lionel Richie’s ‘All Night Long’ one more time, I may actually snap.

“Not in the mood.” His eyes bit through her visage of turquoise taffeta and hot pink eyeshadow, as if she was nothing more than a reflection on the cool waters of his personal projection onto the universe, his will to twist his own perceptions and energies to fit his desires. Everything there that usually kept him at least passably intrigued was faded and dull, and her brightness only made him angry.

“Well, that’s a damn shame. I was about to offer you a birthday lay, if only because you look so fucking sexy brooding in those tight leather pants.” She shrugged. “I’m a virgin. Ready not to be and we’re both here, getting high and drunk, start of the summer and all that. I want to lose it before college starts, you know?”

“A nice offer, but to be honest Tamara I would rather swallow barbed wire.” He stalked off while she called after him that he was a heartless asshole, her most incisive observation of the evening by far.

Yes, he was. By choice and vocation. He needed another drink, but not here. Making a smooth exit, he evaded all his pawing, fawning classmates calling his name and tugging at him, expecting the fun Hannibal who always had some fascinating, unexpected trick of mischief up his sleeve, always a snide joke and the smartest tangents on art and culture, the one who set the standard.

The night outside was better, air stifled by a tremendous heat wave in a way that at least felt honest.

Hannibal climbed onto his motorcycle, strapped his helmet on, and drove home.

On the way, traversing winding rural roads with expert ease, his mind insistently reverted to an incident from earlier that day, the afternoon to be precise, and it felt like complete masochism to replay the memory.

He wished he could wrest it from the inside of his skull and toss it into the nearest body of water, but instead he remembered how he had approached the history teacher at school and… for lack of a less humiliating turn of phrase, thrown himself at the man, hoping to lose his virginity on his birthday to the stunning instructor who had put him into a thrall from the first time Hannibal had heard him lecture.

"Oh, Hannibal, no, I really can't," Mr. Lanka – Jonas – had insisted gently, throwing his hands up when Hannibal tried to issue an awkward embrace. *"It would be terribly unprofessional and a risk to my job, in addition to which, cruel to you, taking advantage of your comparative youth, my position as your teacher,*

Hannibal, devastating in black eyeliner and a scowl of heated lust, backed into the desk and stared down the object of his obsessed romantic dreams, his slender body sensitized all over with the need to be claimed at last. He had tasted every other pleasure, forbidden or otherwise, that life as a rich boy had to offer, much to his uncle's continual revulsion. And he had heard from Robertus constantly how the tragedy at Castle Lecter had warped him into a wildly selfish brat who shamed the grand family name so unapologetically.

The indulgences, from deep wet kisses shared with the prettiest boys and girls in his year and beneath it, to thrill-seeking risks like illegal car and motorcycle racing and skinny dipping in the headmaster's pool with his "friends," to dalliances with cigarettes, drugs and alcohol and staying up all night to sleep all day before starting over again in the morning – they had adequately fulfilled his many curiosities.

Sometimes he thought about a reprisal of the gruesome violence he had visited upon Mischa's killers, and he wondered what it would be like to feel the elation of destruction without the horror of grief as motivation. To murder simply because he could, or better yet, to heighten the beauty in this world by removing someone whose influence upon it was ugly, then to display them in an artistically irresistible manner while he slipped into his shadows to feast on their remains, it beguiled him as a concept.

He waited for the inspiration to begin this experiment, but in the meantime he wanted to supplement his aesthetical journey through life's kaleidoscope of colliding sensations, he wanted to cast aside his only remaining mystery – that of lovemaking, and the shame and the brutal misery of it all was that he appeared incapable of partaking with a partner who did not intrigue him, who did not hit exactly upon his design of loveliness and excitement.

Jonas embodied the ideal man completely to Hannibal's young eyes: he was in his late thirties, with brilliant aquamarine eyes under thick glasses that only enhanced their beauty and the sense of his magnetizing intellectualism.

He wore tweed suits with patches on the elbows of his blazers, and his tie was often crooked; he got carried away talking passionately about the Ancient Greeks, their philosophy and

mythology, and did not seem to realize how long he'd gone on sharing his excited and compelling insights until the bell rang and he woke up to a sense of time. Hannibal only wanted to stay after class for the rest of his life, but it would appear his excessive infatuation was unrequited. The one person he wanted didn't want him.

"I don't want to hurt your feelings, and you're really very beautiful – I'm ever so flattered, especially as any of the students would be falling over each other for the chance to make love to you, but I can't –"

Hannibal could still hear the teacher's awkwardly babbled rejection and see how he had run a hand through his brown curls nervously, hoping Hannibal wouldn't embarrass himself any further or put him in the position of defending himself against an unwanted seductive overture.

But unfortunately, he was far more absorbed in the way it sounded when Jonas called him beautiful, and he was quite worried he might have had his heart broken that day. He did not wish to dwell on the fact but it would not leave him, it would not give him peace. There was more vodka in his uncle's study at home in their sprawling mansion, and that was Hannibal's next destination.

When he pulled his motorcycle into the long circular driveway, he parked it neatly beside the brand new, shining car Robertus had left for him as a birthday gift. A silent message, if his uncle bothered to return home this weekend at all, that he didn't care for anything the car represented.

A note on the dashboard, simply offering him a cold "on this happiest of days, all best, Uncle Robertus," transparently typed by his secretary, was held down by the family ring when Hannibal came outside that morning to discover the "gift."

And Hannibal was held down too, by his uncle's demanding expectations he stop *"mucking about"* and follow his family's noble, royal habits of aristocratic dignity, settle down for a life of boring diplomacy. Leave behind his fanciful pursuits of art, music and traveling to America to pursue a career in medicine, consign himself to the prison cell of Robertus' chosen college and specialization (political science and business), get in line. Stop dressing in his *eccentric* ways and standing out, stop being Hannibal.

The ring felt like it was poisoned, digging into his finger with unwanted obligations and guilt about *"what his parents would have wanted him to do."* That was one of Robertus' favorite phrases and he alternated it with "*you're so defensive, Hannibal, too sensitive*" as a means of working his whims on his often rebellious nephew.

His mind was tired of the abuse, and the rejection from Jonas just felt like another layer peeled back on his exhausted heart seeking beauty in an ugly world. He stormed to Robertus' quiet, abandoned study like a bat out of the most elegant hell, then poured himself a generous fresh glass of expensive and very fine vodka, staring at the big family portrait on the wall.

Since his parents and Mischa were in the painting, Hannibal had often begged Robertus to take it down. It was too painful to look upon their faces, his detached but beautiful and fascinating parents, his beloved little sister, the only one who had ever truly seen him.

“Doesn’t your uncle notice his depleting liquor supply?” Lady Murasaki appeared in the doorway of the dim study, her presence as always a light in the darkness.

“It’s a long-running battle between us,” Hannibal answered, meeting her gaze with flaring interest. “Robertus changes the lock on the liquor cabinet, I pick it, then drink all his vodka and replace it with water. A little surprise for him the next time he wants a martini. Would you like a drink?”

She shook her head but lingered, leaning on the doorframe like a romantic Rossetti painting in living color, lush with youth, charm and melancholy. Her raven hair fell in glossy curls all around her pale, slender shoulders, and she wore a brilliant red one-piece bathing suit with a ruffle at the low v neckline, black stilettos, and an open, sheer black cover-up robe. Around her neck there was a dazzling necklace, sparkling with diamonds and rubies. He wondered if it felt as heavy and burdensome as the family ring he wore.

Robertus’ office was draped in the sort of show-offy decor that displayed wealth while being vacant of style or taste. Yet in his choice of brides, he had shown an exquisite understanding of beauty, surprising his nephew.

Murasaki stood out as much as Hannibal did, but for different reasons. Twenty-five years old, clever and ambitious, a fashion designer although her family had not let her pursue it as a career, preferring to join two aristocratic bloodlines with a marriage to the forty-five year old Robertus, a perfect stranger. Once she arrived at the family’s estate, she was expected to play the dutiful consort, hosting tea parties and charity balls for their elite acquaintances. Their age gap might not have condemned the marriage, but Robertus was no Edward Rochester. He treated her as an ornament to his wealth and power, the jewel in his crown, otherwise quite often neglected.

Hannibal knew what neglect felt like, although he was remembered most often by his uncle when forced in front of his eyes as an annoyance. With Murasaki, Robertus at least seemed to possess a mild, superficial admiration one could almost call affection.

“Did you have a happy birthday?” her voice was soft but strong, curiosity shining in her dark eyes.

“Not so far.” He twisted the ring back and forth around his finger. “How have you been faring lately? Settled into the role of Lady of the Estate?”

“Unsettled, more like. I thought my life would be different. Do you see?” Her mournful tone was mixed with a strange fascination he could not help but feel when it was so precisely directed at him.

“I see. I thought my life would be different, too.”

“Are you still going to be a doctor, travel to the U.S.?” She shook her head, causing the dangling gold earrings she wore to jingle. “A shame to abandon your art, Hannibal. Don’t repeat my mistakes.”

“I won’t abandon it.” He blushed a little, increasingly aware that her eyes admired him. “In fact, I don’t feel that medicine and art need to be mutually exclusive pursuits. What provides more artistic fascination than to explore human anatomy under life and death conditions? I imagine that my sketching will flourish.”

In fact, he had far more specific plans regarding the fruitful blend of surgery and art, but they were ill-suited for Murasaki’s ears. She was a traditional moralist, despite the guilty way she eyed him up, noticing his firm build and chiseled features. In return, he noticed her lovely curves and delicate features, the contrast of red against pale skin striking. She noticed him noticing. There was nothing more to say.

“I’m going for a swim.” She turned and left, slowly making her way down the long hallway, hearing him follow her. No need for her to turn around and question his reasons. They were heading for the deep end.

They lost their sorrows for one night of stolen passion that began in the pool and ended in her bedroom, Hannibal taking over a place his uncle had never been invited to. Whether or not they were physically intimate, they always slept in separate beds.

The pleasure was so profound that it blinded him to anything but the need to be touched and feel another body, a beautiful and tender body wrapped around his own, so much more intense and exciting than the loneliness of masturbation. He realized then he had been lonely even while over-indulging in self-love and telling himself it was enough – that intimacy-wise, he’d never need anyone else.

For several weeks he believed himself in love, decided this must be it, the thrill of secret moments behind curtains and closed doors and his uncle’s back, the delight of soft red lips pressed so desperately to his. Murasaki craved escape to the same extent he did, but her conscience intruded by autumn. Their trysts slowly reduced in frequency from daily to hardly ever, and she told him one day it had to end.

“Are you in love with me?” He asked, disappointed. Feeling abandoned.

“No, Hannibal.” She patted his cheek. “This was never love. When you really fall in love, you’ll know the difference.”

More frustrated than ever, Hannibal stormed away from her condescending words and outside, pausing to catch his breath after he emerged in the back garden. He noticed that his uncle, while away once again on business, had hired workers to tear up the patio where they often had tea or late dinners on warm nights. It was already perfect, but apparently it could be more so.

While the workers weren’t looking, He pulled the Lecter family ring from his finger with a low growl and threw it into the deep hole in the ground that would soon be covered in fresh cement.

He had never felt home here, and no one wanted to be home to him. Chiyoh was away at boarding school and he had nobody to turn to with his unwanted sadness, when he felt like an orphan of the whole universe.

There was a letter in his pocket from Lycée, accepting him into the med school program. He would study in France for a few years first, build up his reputation to ensure that when he crossed the Atlantic, he would easily land a job at the very best of hospitals. His appetite roared for travel, for meaningless affairs to sate his wild sex drive, for soaking up culture and history, learning more languages, refining his skills with the scalpel and his knowledge of anatomy, adding more nails in the planks he'd slammed against the door protecting his heart.

The next train would be leaving the nearest station in an hour's time. Hannibal did not even pack a bag, only his survival instinct and his curved hunting knife, plus his identification and a redirected hunger. He would never let himself fall prey to the nonsensical, false promise of romance, nor expose himself to potential rejection. Life was full of pleasure, but debauchery was the only safe way to indulge – and indulge he *would*. Yes, he would take what he wanted, subduing lovers and victims in a barrage of domination. Since nobody wanted Hannibal's heart, he'd keep it to himself.

Watching the gorgeous panoramic views flashing by during his long train ride, he assumed that if he ignored the sinking feeling in his heart regarding the impossibility of true love, of course it would eventually die down and disappear.

It's just another sad love song

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Louisiana, Spring of 1993

Will put the finishing touches on the display he was creating for Jurassic Park prom, paying careful attention to make sure the fairy lights were perfectly entwined around the vines which he had draped along the large function room in strategic places. When the prom came around tomorrow night, there was no doubt it would be an enchanted evening.

It had been a nothing blank space of a room before Will had begun his design; the big family restaurant with its Italian food menu was never a draw in his town where everyone flocked to the French and seafood places. So Mr. Martini had shifted his focus to hosting events, making sure the largest dining room was plain and clean, an empty canvas to be shaped to whatever the next party was.

Now, though, now it was a magical setting, a fitting place for the whole senior class to dance the end of the school year into stars and romance. Even the looming shadows of huge dinosaurs along the walls looked fucking cool, unlike the stick-on holographic neon designs which he had been given by Kim Banks, the bossy head of the prom committee. As if it wasn't bad enough she'd allowed the theme of "Jurassic Park" to win the committee's poll of so many other, better choices (Will knew his own idea was better: "Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves," complete with medieval decor, a real knight's suit of armor on the stage beside the dj, and centerpieces made out of purses which the famous thief would have stolen from the poor. And that amazing Bryan Adams song would play at the right climactic moment. Epic.)

But he'd done phenomenally well, considering the difficult theme that might have been about as atmospheric as a Kriss Kross song, left in the hands of his half-interested colleagues on the committee. The rest of them, b-list popular kids or those who needed a last-minute extracurricular credit to lock down their college scholarship, had all yawned and left after tossing some table-cloths down and carrying in the ginormous punch bowl.

Will felt inspired. He had a funny sort of investment in prom considering he hadn't gone to it junior year (no date, too shy to ask anyone and no one asked him) and had no plans to attend it solo this year either. From his distant position and sideline contribution, he had somehow been *part* of the special night which everyone said was supposed to be so memorable. Anyone would want to dance here, under the green, twinkling lights, surrounded by realistic-looking greenery, awesome dinosaurs looking on as the dj played Salt 'n Peppa, Boyz to Men and Mariah.

Whatever, all that stuff happened in another galaxy from where Will and his friend Charlie spent most of their time playing Super Nintendo and talking about crushes they never made a move on. Maybe being young and queer came with a free bonus treat of being ridiculously awkward, too. He never knew what to say on those rare occasions he had an opening to talk

to Viola Chisholm, the elegant debate club president who unknowingly had his heart in the palm of her hand.

“Hey, thanks for letting me stay an extra hour to finish the decorations, Mr. Martini,” Will said warmly to the restaurant owner with a white mustache and friendly smile.

Mr. Martini didn’t open the restaurant for dinner until seven and it was only five, so he sat at a table near the entrance, a stack of receipts and a calculator in front of him. “Oh. It’s no problemo for such a nice young man! Working so hard when all your little friends blew you off.”

“They didn’t blow me off, I mean,” Will laughed and paused by the door with his hands in his jean pockets. “They just had other places to be, you know how it is.”

“I do know how it is,” Mr. Martini replied archly in his florid Italian accent. “And it seems to me you did all the work while they went to the mall. My advice? Don’t keep letting other people take advantage of your good intentions and hard work.”

“Sheesh, I guess.” Will shrugged. “I kind of wanted to do it myself anyway. It came out better without the other stickers that Kim wanted to use.”

“Well, at least you’re happy. And I bet you’ll have a wonderful night tomorrow dancing with your friends.” Mr. Martini looked down at his work again, punching another figure into the calculator.

“Oh, I’m not *going* to prom,” Will explained with another chuckle. “I just wanted to help out. It’s nice to be involved is all.”

Mr. Martini’s smile faded. “Wait right here, kid.”

He went into the kitchen and came back with a large to-go container, gesturing for Will to take it. “On the house. You deserve it.”

Will lifted one corner of the foil to find fresh-made lasagna. “Um, thanks?”

In the parking lot, he found his Dad’s jeep and unlocked it, then carefully slid the lasagna onto the backseat. It was a gorgeous, sunny day, and perfect for putting the top down. As he put his sunglasses on and started up the car, Will wondered why Mr. Martini found his decisions so confusing or sad/admirable enough to earn a huge free lasagna. There was nothing wrong with being nice and hardworking, surely? Or wanting to have a glimpse of how the other half lived, the half – or more like 90% of the school who had dates. That was normal. Right?

Still parked at Martini’s, he heard a car horn beep near him and looked over to see none other than Viola Chisholm, as beautiful and blonde and perfect as ever, except for the fact that she was crying hysterically and smashing her hand into the horn of her grape popsicle colored Mazda.

Concerned, Will hopped out of the jeep and went over to the Mazda, mildly knocking on the window and mouthing, “Are you okay?”

Viola twisted the knob that lowered the window and snapped, red-eyed and wobbly-voiced, “*What?*”

He loved the sound of her cute voice, even squeaky from bawling, and her primly pretty face with those full pink lips, those chocolate colored eyes and her fluffy bob haircut, currently disheveled but still angelic in his eyes. He loved her red nail polish and the smell of her Love’s Baby Soft perfume and how black mascara had drawn two long, bold lines from her sore, wet eyes down to her also-wobbling chin. If there was anything he could do to make her feel better, he was all in.

“I saw you just now because you beeped the horn. Just wanted to check if you were okay. I’m Will Graham, I’m in your homeroom,” he clarified when she squinted at him through her chunky, marred mascara lashes.

“Oh. You do look familiar now that I…thank you for checking, I…” her chest shook with more crying and Will wished he could hug her.

She looked discerningly at his bright blue eyes, his trim figure with decent definition due to his active hobbies of fishing, boat repair and going down to the river, playing with whatever stray dog he had taken in recently to his mother’s exhausted distress. His unruly but clean and attractive curly, brown hair and the fit of his worn blue jeans, how his *Class of ‘93* t-shirt lay flat against a toned stomach and his expression was sincere, open and caring.

“You know I’ve been with Kyle Bartlett since sophomore year.” A statement, not a question. Everyone at school knew about the power couple, Kyle the football star and Viola the scholastic whiz, obvious prom king and queen choices, like they were last year.

“Was that Kyle on the phone?” Will asked helpfully when Viola paused to endure a few more shaky sniffles. He gestured to the large car phone still clutched in her hand, emitting a dial tone that quickly turned into the operator asking if she needed help.

Viola shoved the phone back in its panel on the dashboard and crossed her arms, petulant. “Yes. He just broke up with me, a day before the prom! A day! He tells me he’s leavin’ me for some cheerleader from Southside, he met her at an away game, it’s a whole Capulet and Montague thing, which makes me Rosaline. It’s beyond – it’s the end of the world.”

He nodded, easily understanding the lofty Shakespearian allusions.

“Well, they aren’t going to make a Southside cheerleader prom queen. You’re still a shoo-in,” Will smiled consolingly. “You’re also probably better off not staying with a cheater who doesn’t appreciate you, if you don’t mind my saying.”

Her eyes flicked attentively over his face and body again. “You’re sweet,” she concluded.

“Aw, thank you, Viola, so are you. Is there anything else I can do to help you feel better? It’s just awful of him to break it to you over the phone like that.”

“There *is* something you can do, Bill.”

“Will,” Will said, still with an encouraging and not-offended grin.

“Will. You can take me to prom.” She gave him a determined look. “Why should I let Kyle and his little tramp ruin my senior prom? Or take away my well-earned and glorious prom court experience? Here you are, handsome, available, thoughtful and kind. Why shouldn’t we go together?”

She waited while he stood by her car staring in shock with his mouth hanging open for a few beats. “Earth to Will. That’s your name, right?”

“Y-yes, yup, sure is, Will Graham. We’ve had classes together for four years. Um, I might be losing my mind, could be the heat, but um.” He pressed his lips together. “Did you just ask me to prom?”

“I did. Are you in?” She looked better, happier in this new choice. As if she was taking her prom queen superpowers back. He thought he’d never seen anyone so adorable.

“Of course! I’d be so honored to–”

“Fine. You can pick me up with a limo at 7 o’clock sharp. I live at 75 Rutherford. We must be at least an hour late gettin’ here to let everyone’s excitement over what I’ll be wearin’ build up. Get me a teal corsage, make sure you coordinate your tie to that shade, and…that covers it, I think.”

Viola had blotted her teary face with kleenex, then rolled the tissues up neatly and stowed them in a plastic bag in the glove compartment. She put on some lotion that smelled just like her soft, floral perfume and covered her red eyes with a pair of purple sunglasses that matched the car.

Will didn’t even have a pad and paper to jot down all these necessities. Luckily, he had an excellent memory, despite lamenting the lack of a physical list just to back himself up when he got to the store. More unluckily, he heard an idiotic voice asking Viola if she wanted to have dinner with him that night and he was fairly certain he was that idiot. He also asked her if she liked lasagna and started to tell her the story of his sudden lasagna acquisition, only to be interrupted.

“Thanks, Will, you’re doin’ me a real solid. See you tomorrow night!”

And then she was off to wherever the fabulous people went between exciting events.

Will only hesitated for a few more moments to process his shock at this amazing turnaround in his fate, and then he bolted to the Jeep and hopped in. He had so much to get done before prom!

***

The following afternoon after school, Will hurried home to get a few tasks finished before the limo was due to arrive. He had to study for a calculus test and figure out how a bow tie

worked (his mom might know but Travis would be useless of course. He'd worn a string tie to his own wedding).

Maddie had expressed concern that Viola had asked Will to be a replacement date at the last minute, while expecting him to purchase or rent himself a suit with such a specific color tie, plus rent a limo and get her a corsage.

"It's not very nice of her to do that, and she didn't even offer to go dutch?" Maddie stood at the stove stirring a pot of jambalaya. She clucked her tongue and shook her head. "And you say they live on Rutherford?"

Travis whistled, "Son, that's the richest neighborhood in town. She should be paying for everything seein' as she dropped this invitation in your lap outta nowhere. It was damn good of you to agree to go."

"Aw, guys, c'mon, it ain't like that," Will sighed. He looked up from studying across the table from his dad, his eyes wide and innocent. "I'm over the moon to be goin' to my senior prom at all, never mind with my actual dream girl! And as the guy, it's the honorable thing to pay for those parts."

"Did you tell her it'd cost all your allowance plus an advance on the next two months?" Travis folded his newspaper in half and pointed to Will. "Then she tells you to get her a teal corsage and you a tie to match like those are just lyin' around, twenty-four hours before the prom? I don't like it either."

Will groaned. "You can't protect me from these formative experiences. Mom, Dad, you need to accept that in a few months, I won't even be getting an allowance anymore because I'll be in a college dorm. A grown man, taking on the world – alone. But first, for one more night, let me be a teenager – reckless decisions and all."

"Better take it easy on the reckless decisions before you send your mom over the deep end." Travis winced, anticipating Maddie's reaction.

"Don't you touch a *drop* of liquor tonight and say no to drugs," Maddie insisted sternly. "And if you and Viola decide to be intimate, remember, always be safe–"

"Mom, no, no, no, I'm eighteen, don't talk to me about that stuff! Gross!" Will waved off the unnecessary concern and went upstairs to shower and change into his tux.

He was way to excited to let his parent's downright paranoid doubts of Viola's integrity hold him back. It was going to be the best night of his life.

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The limo had just pulled up outside the Graham's house when the phone in the kitchen rang. Will ran downstairs, taking them two at a time, all flushed with excitement, and came in to see his mom looking positively wretched, holding the phone and staring at him apologetically.

“It’s Viola,” she mouthed, passing him the receiver. She squeezed his shoulder, then went over to Travis, who had been trying to figure out how his new camera worked so they could take photos of Will on his big night. Will thought he heard his mom whispering in her angriest tone to Travis, "*got a goddamn nerve,*" and he wondered what that was all about.

“Hey, what’s up? I’m all ready to go and the limo’s here,” Will enthused into the banana yellow phone which had hung on the blue floral wallpaper of this room since he was a toddler.

Viola spoke with Oprah-level pathos, which made sense since she planned to be a journalist one day. “Will, I am so desperately sorry, so completely to blame and – oh, it’s such a total bitch move to do this to you at the last second, but…well, a little while ago Kyle came over with a big bouquet and a million apologies. Said he didn’t love that other girl, didn’t even like her, it was all a huge mistake and I’d misunderstood most of it. You know how horrible the gossip is around here, small town and all that.”

“What exactly are you tryin’ to say here, Viola? You don’t mean you took him back and you’re gonna let him take you to prom after you had me runnin’ around like a crazy person fulfilling all your needs – the teal flowers alone, I had to ask them to dye, and it took ages. I’m standin’ here wearin’ a tux–”

“Will, I said I was sorry! You don’t have to drag me over the coals like that,” Viola said indignantly. “It’s just plain mean. I have a huge event ahead of me and I can’t be worryin’ about–”

Will slammed the receiver back into the hook so hard the whole phone fell off the wall and crashed to the floor, the receiver shattering. He raced past his parents with their shocked looks of worry and the pity that would make him feel even worse. He ran and ran, getting his shiny new dress shoes all dirty as he got onto the road to the river, finally stopping when he came to the quiet, big rock under a calm old tree. This was his thinking spot. He sat down with a grunt of unabated rage and wiped sweat from his brow. His hands had formed fists on his knees, pressing in so hard it left bruises.

He refused to cry.

But he was absolutely *never* going through this again. The despair of being played for a fool by someone he idealized and dreamed about, the constant pattern in his social life (apart from his friendship with Charlie) of him being give, give, give, and everyone else just *taking* until he had nothing left even for himself – it was fucking *over.*

He wished he could walk right into Martini’s restaurant and storm the goddamn function room, tear apart every stupid, carefully arranged decoration he’d spent hours on, but there was no way he’d still be allowed to graduate if he did that.

So he just settled for blowing off steam throwing rocks of various sizes into the river, alternatively imagining he was caving in Kyle’s skull or Viola’s. These visions of brutal murders had plagued him for years, long before he shot his mother's abusive boss point blank in the head at age fifteen, and he was used to having to deal with his fucked up devil side. He

didn’t want to be that guy, the one from his fantasies that just killed anyone who bothered him and stood with haughty triumph over their corpses.

Did he?

He'd never before wanted to be that loner guy that nobody ever really knew, but that night he went to Charlie’s and they watched *Batman* on video, not saying a single word about Viola or prom. Charlie just knew. She’d sworn off prom herself, annoyed with the rules that said everyone had to bring a date of the opposite sex. Will thought Batman had a good point: live in the shadows, hide who he really was, but revel in his power, impose his vigilante justice by night.

The next morning, he woke up with a new attitude and finished the school year with most of his classmates thinking he was a new student, a stranger, late addition joining their ranks just to finish up an incomplete degree from another institution. He started dressing in dark colors and slicking his hair back, a box of cigarettes stylishly stuck under the sleeve of his clingy t-shirt, a disdainful look or sly smile his only two expressions.

He soon lined up plenty of dates but never got serious because Viola had taught him what happened when you were *the nice boy.* By the time he seduced Beth Ann Newman from chem class in the back of the pick up truck he’d borrowed from Charlie, who’d borrowed it without permission from her much nicer new foster dad, Will was a real lothario. He gave Beth Ann a smoldering night of passion that never made it to his cold heart, and they were both utterly indifferent to each other afterwards, like it never happened.

True love was nothing but a lie, after all, and he was done chasing childish dreams.

Chapter End Notes

🥺🥺🥺

If only the boys could make it up to each other now for the heartbreaks they each faced in their youth. Interesting that even back then, they each had a very clear *type*.. 👀

Somehow, I've got a feeling that the very next chapter features a romantic and carefully planned proposal. (Because it does! 😀)

Indestructible

Chapter Notes

Welcome to the last three chapters? Is that really possible? Seems surreal.

cw: dirty talk involving "slut"/"whore" types of endearments among many others 🥰

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"*Look into my eyes*
You will see
What you mean to me
Search your heart
Search your soul
And when you find me there
You'll search no more" - Bryan Adams

Now.

Will came down to breakfast late in the morning, after the others had all dined. He'd been pretty tired out by the drama and excitement and *everything* of the night before, and Hannibal had whispered a tender good morning a couple hours earlier, encouraging him to sleep in and rest. That he would take care of host duties towards their house guests.

He lingered at the bottom of the stairs to finish another epic yawn, patting his mouth and taking another minute to finish stretching. For an outfit, he'd thrown on one of Hannibal's white button-downs that smelled like him and a pair of black dress pants which were his own. Like everything else Hannibal had commissioned for him to wear, the trousers lovingly hugged Will's lower body, showing off his slender waist and the curves of his ass and thighs. To top it off, a pair of brandy colored leather dress boots which were another gift from his lover, and quite frankly looked fucking cool.

Did he sort of look like he was on his way to perform in a self-indulgent indie theatre performance as Romeo? Hell yes.

Was he wearing almost every single piece of jewelry Hannibal had ever given him? Sure. The multi-stranded necklace from Christmas looked perfect peeking out from his shirt, which he'd only bothered fastening a few buttons on. And the Tiffany rose gold and diamond bangle casually encircling his wrist below the slouchy rolled up sleeves? It had set Hannibal back 22 grand, *All. For. Will.*

He was wearing a thong which his fiance had given him, too, but well. That was for later (and for him to be thinking about all day, wondering what Hannibal would do about it

exactly). The cologne, the aftershave, every detail exorbitant, fine and luxurious. He was marked as Hannibal's from head to toe.

If he had to deal with being polite to Murasaki, now knowing her to be Hannibal's ex, he was going to make damn sure she knew the extent of her step-nephew's obsessive claim on *him.* He'd really love to rub her face in it, matter of fact.

Lazily, he checked his watch and saw that he had a little time before he was going to drive to Quantico. He'd promised Jack to come in and give some input on a new case, while reminding his boss he was still on leave from active field duty and this was only a *favor.*

But first, breakfast.

With haughty cheerfulness and a spring in his step, high on all that cathartic sex and confessing the night before, freshly reconfirmed in his confidence about his wonderful relationship which was well, facing it honestly, better than other people's?, Will made his way to the kitchen.

He found the plate of food which Hannibal had left him in the oven and headed into the dining room, discovering that it contained his fiance, who was drinking coffee and casting a look of polite questioning at his uncle. Murasaki stood beside Robertus near the far end of the table, her arm slipped through the grand-duke's and a demeanor of resignation. Robertus just looked impatient, and Will had to wonder if he had the skill which he had developed months ago of seeing through Hannibal's microexpressions wherein the most serene look actually conveyed the deepest hatred. If he did, he would have seen enough hate there to make him truly afraid, so Will guessed Robertus saw what he chose to.

"Naturally, we had planned our visit to be of a considerable duration," Robertus explained with his usual pomposity, like the world revolved around him. "A week at least, and I had hoped to better gauge the life you are building, nephew, to assure you do not lead yourself into peril with impulsive choices. You never were impulsive before in your life. Now…"

He shook his head.

Will stood in the doorway and propped his hip on it, plate of food in his hand and his eyes on the confusing scene before him. A curl tumbled across his forehead and he moved his head a little to make it move to one side so it didn't tickle and itch him. In this moment, Hannibal's eyes locked on his, warm and adoring. Relieved.

"Now Hannibal is living," Musasaki put in with a reproving smile for her husband. "He's present in each moment, filled with purpose and optimism for a bright future. Endless possibilities. Have you ever felt like that, husband?"

Robertus looked confused. He didn't speak this language of emotion above reason. "Certainly not," he scoffed.

"Then can't you be happy for me?" Hannibal asked in a prideful snit, but there was a real vulnerability there, as if despite it all, he would rather mend fences than argue.

It really made a difference that Robertus was a Lecter. That he looked like Hannibal and Hannibal's own father and his existence was a tether to Hannibal's lost parents and sister. This simple fact seemed to sway Hannibal towards peace where in any other case he would have killed the man years ago, probably the first time Robertus treated him rudely.

"I can certainly wish you great luck, you and your American…" Robertus waved his hand in Will's general direction.

Will smirked. "Profiler?" he suggested, chewing a nub of bacon thoughtfully, then adding, "Fiance? Future…what do I get to be, anyway, honey? Am I your co-Duke?"

"His what?" Robertus sputtered.

"You will be my consort, dear, and a member of the Lithuanian nobility." Hannibal beamed at Will, who had really only said the ridiculous fake title to get a rise out of Robertus.

"I shudder to think," Robertus sighed, but Murasaki made a subtle movement, almost enough to suggest that her foot, obscured from view by the table and chair, might have pressed painfully down on her husband's.

"I shudder to think," the Grand Duke corrected himself with a wince as Murasaki smiled pleasantly, "What a loss it would have been not to have you in the family, Agent Graham. You and your fifteen dogs."

"There's only seven," Will explained, licking some fresh strawberry jam off his finger from the toast on his plate.

"They *sound* like there are fifteen. Well, then." Robertus straightened up his already rod-severe posture and reached for the handle on his rolling suitcase. "Good to see you, nephew. I will be sure to send a gift after hearing of the wedding."

"Goodbye, Uncle Robertus," Hannibal said, resolved not to care much outside of relief at the departure. "So sorry that urgent business has called on you unexpectedly."

Will smiled at his handsome fiance, who was already dressed for the day in his lovely three piece suit of grey plaid. He felt no need to look at the guests. The jealousy over the past affair with Murasaki simply evaporated, melted by the heatwave of Hannibal's love cascading in his direction with an equally devoted gaze.

"Bye, you guys," he said, again purposely like an annoying teenaged brat, keeping his eyes on Hannibal as he walked towards him. He wrapped his arms around Hannibal's neck from behind and leaned over him, kissing his forehead and giggling softly. "All alone again, Daddy," he whispered.

"You naughty boy," Hannibal chuckled, kissing the inside of Will's arm and then biting lightly. "Impossible, beautiful brat. Whatever am I to do with you?"

"Well, that's for *you* to decide."

Murasaki and Robertus had to pass through the hallway to reach the front door, and the fiances could hear their little luggage wheels rolling along behind them.

The dogs tried to give chase, so Will went to help, winking over his shoulder as his swaying hips showed his ass to perfection, visible with his movements that shifted the boxy shirt to reveal more of his curves through the fabric beneath.

Robertus was already outside, walking towards the hired car, not bothering with things like holding the doors for his wife or helping to put her suitcase in the trunk. Will couldn't believe that Hannibal shared any DNA with that man.

"C'mon guys, say goodbye and let Lady Murasaki be on her way," he coaxed, laughing when Buster stopped trying to jump up on the departing guest's slender leg, obeying his master and going to sit in a neat row beside his adopted siblings.

Murasaki murmured a fond and calming goodbye to each dog in turn, then passed Will on her way out the door and added, "You're so good for him, Will. He's lucky to have found you, and I couldn't be happier for you."

There were tears in her eyes but he knew she meant what she said. With anyone else, he might have squeezed her hand in comfort, but he wasn't touching hands that had touched Hannibal, even going on thirty years ago. There was just no way to guarantee he wouldn't deliberately and fiercely twist her wrist to break it, then snap her neck like a twig. And he didn't think she deserved it.

"Do you still love him?" Will crossed his arms instead. He knew Hannibal didn't have any feelings like that for her anymore. But how did she feel? He wasn't sure why he cared or if it mattered.

"Oh. Hannibal should not have told you about…that was so very long ago, and a grave mistake. No, I don't love Hannibal in that way, only as a dear step-nephew and friend. You know, it would not make the slightest difference if I were fainting with love for him, since he is so passionately devoted to you that everyone else vanishes from a room you are in."

"Well," Will cracked a smile, disposed to be forgiving. "That's true."

"I cannot even imagine what it is like to have the kind of happiness you two have found, but it comforts me to know you don't need encouraging to hold onto it forever."

"Hey, you could still find true love," Will shrugged. "It's never too late."

Murasaki looked at him sadly, then glanced to the open door, through which they could see the shining luxury car which Robertus had hired for a fifteen minute trip to the airport.

"Isn't it, though?" she asked rhetorically. A traditionalist, raised to be so, too stuck in her ways to change, even to know how. Then she turned and walked away, pulling her suitcase through, then closing the door behind her.

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“You look perfect,” Hannibal enthused, years of tension immediately rolling off his demeanor the second the door shut behind his uncle.

He had come out into the front hall, striding confidently to his fiance and putting a large, warm hand on each of Will’s hips with a teasing little pull forward.

Will laughed. “Mmm, any particular reason for the compliment?” He kissed Hannibal’s lips slowly, savoring the chance to do so a few more times before he had to hit the road for his work day.

“I have something planned for this evening, my dear, and this scrumptious little outfit happens to be the ideal attire. It does shock me that you expect me to allow you out of the house looking that way…” He firmly squeezed Will’s ass, making the younger man yelp in amused pleasure.

“Doesn’t matter how I look. This?” Will ran a hand back and forth in front of his physique. “It’s all yours and only yours, Daddy.”

Hannibal smiled, “And don’t I know it,” backing Will against the wall and giving him so many hot, deep kisses while his hands groped Will’s body liberally, that the profiler was still blushing an hour later when he walked into the Quantico offices.

***

Will was surprised to see Hannibal again only a couple of hours later, as he took a break from consulting with the team on the latest murder case. He was in the staff break room, innocently mixing bright orange powder into a small paper bowl intended for the microwave, when Hannibal’s voice suddenly piped up behind him, “What in the name of everything unholy is that?”

“It’s, um, Easy Mac,” Will admitted, wincing but laughing as well.

He turned around to see Hannibal standing there with one of his patented super amazing homemade lunches in his hand. Within the insulated bag, Will knew there would be a gourmet bento and probably a sweet love note and fresh flower from some exotic location in a color that you could only get every three years when the moon shone on a garden in just such a certain way.

“You forgot your lunch, so it seemed like a perfect opportunity to sneak in an extra glimpse of you during the workday.” With a coy smile, Hannibal handed Will the insulated lunch bag as well as a thick, embossed, fancy envelope that looked like an invitation. The outside of the envelope said *To Mr. Will Graham*

“What’s this, then?” Will asked, enchanted by his lover’s elegant, formal manners. Who else gave their significant other hand-written invitations when they already lived together?

“I was going to have it delivered to you via courier, but given the lunch situation…” Hannibal approached the uncooked cup of Easy Mac, which resembled a terrifying, small cardboard kiddie pool of orange powder floating ominous atop tepid sink water.

“It seems to have been a rather desperately fortunate twist of fate that brought me here in person,” Hannibal added.

He lifted the offending Easy Mac with two widely spread fingers as if fearing it would infect him with some deadly ailment, drained it carefully and placed it in the garbage as he would close the door after a particularly annoying therapy client departed their appointment.

“I’ll say.” Will had glanced into the lunch bag, predictably stuffed to the brim with enticing delicacies that made his tummy rumble.

Way too food much for one person, as Hannibal always did. Will sometimes wanted to cry, thinking about the possible reasons for Hannibal’s excesses when it came to dinner table displays and the sheer amount of food he tended to put out, always exceeding the number of people dining. The starvation he had endured in childhood had made him an overdoer, as if constantly wanting to reassure himself there would always be enough. Then adding in his tendency to spoil Will, it was no wonder the lunch was so decadently curated.

“Want me to open this now?” Will set the lunch on the counter and gestured with the envelope.

“No indeed.” Hannibal walked right to Will and placed a hand on each of his arms, slipping his hands into the little nook of Will’s elbows, almost as if bracing himself for something.

What could it be? Curiouser and curiouser.

“You’re to open that once I depart,” Hannibal clarified. “And I shall see you this evening at home, my dear. Eat your lunch like a good boy and keep out of trouble till then. Drive safely.”

“I will. I’m so eager to see what this is all about, I’ll be extra good and extra careful.” Will smirked softly, “I wouldn’t miss one of your surprises for the world.”

Hannibal gave him a coy little wink and a warm kiss to his cheek, then strode out of the room showing the same nervously excited attitude with which he’d entered it.

What was this all about? Will slowly slid his finger under the seal of the envelope, denying his growling stomach which was more interested in the charcuterie and fresh fruit in his lunch bag but would have settled happily for the Easy Mac.

The heavy piece of grand stationary was covered in large, scrolling letters of Hannibal’s beautifully perfect cursive.

Mr. William Graham, you are hereby invited to - A Very Special Evening - Beginning at Eight O’Clock pm at–

And there followed his and Hannibal’s own home address.

Your host highly anticipates your arrival, Mr. Graham, and intends to sweep you off your feet with a surprise…perhaps even several surprises.

Will got those same old butterflies in his stomach that edged out his hunger for anything but Hannibal. Months of committed relationship status had only increased his obsession, and he was so eager for the hours to fly by, he could barely stand waiting it out despite the rather fun trick that it was to work for Jack.

Normally, he'd have a ball hamming it up as Good Will, pretending to be appalled whenever the Ripper came up in conversation, pretending not to feel fabulously smug when Jack dropped word that Frederick Chilton would likely spend the rest of his life in the BSHCI (on the other side of the cage this time) and drawing up a profile on the new case that ensured Jack's team would have the killer nabbed in no time.

This particular killer might have been passing fun to hunt himself, but he had better things to do that night and there was no doubt that Jack and the forensics team – namely Beverly and her amazing way with a gun – would close the matter post haste, now he'd given them all they needed to find the murderer.

He stuck it out, knowing the cover of his generous, kind and scrupulously moral self must be preserved at the FBI, even if his effortless profiling was supplemented by constant glances at the clock. *Move,* he silently willed the hands slowly creeping towards the end of his work day, *come on…*

When he'd finally escaped Quantico and even the delighted chitchat from his friends that he would normally love to indulge in (apparently Brian and Jimmy were in a big fight over whether to expand their home aquarium, and Beverly was enjoying the petty bickering way too much), Will had to make himself not speed until he finally arrived home, breathing a little quickly, heart beating a little loud in his own ears.

Could it be a new victim for them to torture to death and eat for dinner? Perhaps Hannibal had just made a meal of Will's favorite foods and put his favorite record on, so they could dance before dinner; maybe he wanted to suggest they go on vacation sooner than later, or it could be–

"*Soul Asylum?*" Will said in total confusion as he got to the front door hurriedly and heard early 90s music playing on blast from inside.

"Runaway Train," he remembered this song from senior year, when he got in a fight with some meathead whose name he didn't even remember, over some girl he didn't really want in the first place aside from a distraction. Because of the fight, Will had to take an elective to make sure he graduated and the only one available was chorus. He'd had to belt out that damn song a million times while vowing to be more careful the next time he had a score to settle in the school hallways.

The melancholy soul-searching melody of "Runaway Train" faded as Will let himself in and sucked in a breath. Mariah Carey was on now, singing about her Dreamlover, and Will's jaw dropped at the way the house looked.

Hannibal's elegant home decor had been changed into – well, what the hell was this? Everywhere Will looked there was new and fresh, real greenery, hanging from the ceiling and clustered with tiny, soft white fairy lights all over the walls, twining down the hallway where

Will, staring in surprised confusion and feeling pretty impressed, next discovered several trees, actual *trees,* the petite sort you could pot and keep in the home or garden. The floor was covered in a carpet of transplanted grass, and vibrant tropical flowers flamed in shades of orange and magenta.

Will's lips were parting to say "Hannibal?" In a tremulous sort of way, with the mild suspicion the house had been hijacked by some subsect of the cottagecore movement focused on tropical aesthetics.

But he only got so far as the "Hhhh" because at that moment, the dogs all trotted forth from the sitting room door, happily coming to meet him.

"Oh! look at *you* guys," Will said, immediately melting and bending down to pet them when he saw all seven decked out in the most adorable dinosaur costumes.

"What the hell is going on?" he giggled, asking stegosaurus Winston, who only replied with a merry bark. "Do you know?" triceratops Zoe's bark was an obvious affirmative; however, he could not translate their explanations further than that.

The dogs began barking again and eagerly set off towards the dining room, so Will shrugged and followed behind. The music was getting louder. Mariah had faded into Celine Dion singing "When I Fall in Love."

Will's heart just about exploded when he followed the dino-dogs into the room and found Hannibal waiting there, dressed in a full-on tux and looking beyond amazing. He held an actual corsage, a stunning arrangement of fuchsia green wild orchids. It was the most extravagant miniature floral arrangement Will had ever seen, and if that had been the only gift, he would have been blown away.

Instead, there was Hannibal looking oddly like…a prom date? And above his head, above his nervous wobble of a smile, Will finally noticed a red sign with a familiar movie logo.

Welcome to Jurassic Park!

It dawned on Will finally; he realized as Hannibal moved towards him like time had slowed down to a romantic movie montage, that this was his prom. His Jurassic Park themed prom from senior year of high school. The one he'd spent a whole long, sweaty afternoon working his ass off to decorate and make extra special for classmates who cared nothing about him. The night his date stood him up and broke his heart like it was some cheap glass knick knack, not even noticing the shattered glass of him the following Monday at school, when he could barely speak without crying.

Hannibal had made it all better again, he brought it back so they could do it the right way. He was making Will's teenage dream come true in living color.

"You did all this…" Will whispered, his throat getting tight as his eyes filled with tears. "For me?"

The week after the prom, when Will pulled himself together he built new, high, sturdy, flashy walls around his heart. He started dressing slick and exhibiting a cool, careless, detached confidence, soon able to have quite enough dates with a different beauty several nights a week that his classmates began referring to him as “a player.” At the time, Will had prided himself on learning from the mistakes of his past vulnerability, when he’d been so selfless, kind and – to his thinking after prom – idiotic, laying his heart on the line for someone who barely cared he was alive.

He’d been over opening himself up, told himself he never would again. Retained his easy charm and outgoing personality but kicked aside his honest, aw-shucks, doe-eyed side.

Yet here he was, not one single brick of those walls intact, not even the rubble. Completely honest and more in love than ever. He smiled as Hannibal nodded, blushing, and pinned the lovely corsage to the lapel of Will’s blazer.

“This is your special night, Will. I wanted to show you, how I will spend my whole life endeavoring to give you everything you could ever want and more. Making every fantasy come true, protecting every vulnerability…” Hannibal was at least as happy as he was nervous, tears glazing his eyes.

The usual long dining table had been moved against the far wall in front of the window, laid out with a gorgeous buffet complete with a punch bowl filled with bright green liquid. Will half-suspected absinthe, but knew it was equally likely to be kiwi kool-aid. Not to drink, of course, but because that had been what Will chose for the original prom back in '93 and his choices were honored now, finally.

In the center of the room, that table had been replaced with two smaller round ones covered by green plastic table-cloths (although Hannibal apparently hadn’t been able to resist adding an artfully strewn lace doily sort of thing on each of them); on one of them there were Jurassic Park themed plates, napkins and cups, the kind you could buy for a kid’s birthday party, and balloons were tied to the chairs.

A bottle of champagne rested in a bucket of ice waiting to be poured into paper cups with cartoon pictures of dinosaurs on them. The dino-dogs were politely gathered in one corner, watching Will and Hannibal standing, staring into each other’s eyes, Hannibal taking Will’s hands in his own warm grip.

The other small table held an actual boombox, and beside it Will saw a stack of cd’s, knowing without having to ask Maddie had raided his old collection from the box in the attic they’d brought from Louisiana despite Will’s grumbling he was “over those cheesy old songs.”

From the actual boombox, plugged into the wall between Hannibal’s adorably pretentious indoor herb garden which now blended right into the aesthetic, Celine Dion was singing with slow tenderness, “*when I give my heart, it will be completely / or I’ll never give my heart…*”

And as Will was glancing around in wonderment and soaking it all in, still in shock at the time and effort, the love in every detail, Hannibal, slightly pink in the face but glowing in excitement, got down on one knee.

“Oh, holy shit,” Will whispered, turning red himself and trembling in realization.

Hannibal was grinning and handsome beyond any description. He had even included a shimmering disco ball to the decorations. It hung from the ceiling, casting sparkling diamond lights over the scene in radiant prismatic shades. He produced a ring from his tux jacket pocket, the most beautiful one Will had ever seen, a perfect match to his personality and their love. The ring was dark, sleek and elegant, yet romantic and of course, blinged out to the nines, glimmering with what seemed like a zillion small, round black diamonds.

“It’s perfect, and so are you,” Will smiled, tears sliding down his face and dripping from his chin. He threaded a hand through Hannibal’s hair and cupped his face, soothing the older man’s nervousness. “Everything about this is beyond my wildest dreams.”

“I hope so, my darling." Hannibal leaned into the warm touch of Will’s slightly calloused, working man’s hand as he’d never been able to resist doing. He kissed Will’s palm, then held the ring up again in the proper, old fashioned proposal position. “Of course I bought five different rings and still plan to give them all to you. I had to close my eyes and point to pick one for this evening, since even your mother could not choose between them. She said it ‘stressed her out’ even to try.”

“Oh, of course,” Will laughed softly. All of this, Hannibal’s excessive spoiling and behind the scenes scheming, was simply too cute and wonderful, more than his heart could stand without overflowing.

“Will Graham,” Hannibal said more seriously, causing Will’s smile to change as well, becoming equally focused and entranced. “From the moment we met, I’ve thought of nothing but your smile, the sound of your voice, your brilliant words and the touch of your strong hands. I’ve dreamed all along about making you mine, only it took me a remarkable journey to accept, really believe you could want it, too, equally.”

“I do, Hannibal. Love, I always have,” Will smiled, his words choked with tears.

“Would you do me the greatest honor of my life and agree to spend the rest of yours with me? Be mine, Will, be my husband?”

“Yes,” Will nodded emphatically, giggling, swiping at tear-soaked cheeks, laughing, crying, torn apart with unbearable happiness.

Hannibal slid the ring onto Will’s finger and admired the way it looked, then stood and held his hands up in a very formal gesture. “May I have the first dance of the night?”

Will practically collapsed into the powerful arms that soon wrapped around him as they danced in a glued-together configuration that would have gotten them kicked out of any school dance. Pressed body to body and kissing slowly, they turned under the glittering disco light, vaguely matching the beat of the romantic ballad.

“*And the moment I can feel that you feel that way too, is when I’ll fall in love with you…*”

“Are you still crying, my dear?” Hannibal inquired, tasting the salt in Will’s kiss with slight concern.

“Yes, but don’t worry, it’s nothing but happiness.” Will stared up at Hannibal and shivered in disbelief. “It’s just…” He held onto Hannibal’s shoulders, then smoothed his hands down to his biceps and squeezed the smooth fabric of his tux. “I never thought I would find you.”

“Nor I you, my love.” Hannibal’s voice was equally tight with emotion.

They embraced again and swayed to the next song, which finally managed to cut through Will’s delighted melodrama of joy, adding in a sprinkle of amused arousal.

“Oh, really?”

A classy, familiar opening to a sexy ballad had begun playing from the cd mixer, a device which – at the time Will got it for Christmas in the ‘90’s – had been an amazing technology.

“*Close your eyes, make a wish*
And blow out the candlelight
For tonight is just your night
We're gonna celebrate,
All through the night”

“Well,” Hannibal cleared his throat, playfully self-conscious. “After listening to your entire collection of compact discs from the era –”

“Hmm?” Will raised his eyebrows as Boyz II Men kept singing “I’ll Make Love to You.” “You realize this song actually came out a year *after* my senior prom?”

He smirked. All of the other songs so far had been from the correct year. Hannibal had made an exception for this one, with its sultry lines like “*I’ll submit to your demands*” and “*Girl are you ready? It’s gonna be a long night.*”

“You’d better keep this promise after dinner,” Will insisted, his hands roaming more freely over his fiance’s body while they danced.

He groped Hannibal’s ass with just the right amount of teasing pressure, then lightly spanked, causing his lover to moan softly, melting into absolutely anything Will wanted to do to him. “Such a good Daddy,” Will praised, eyes glowing with adoration.

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Dinner was Louisiana Jurassic Park fusion a la Hannibal. When Will got a closer look at the buffet spread, his jaw dropped again at the minute attention to detail. From the small sandwiches shaped like dinosaurs (made with extravagant imported deli cheeses and smoked human prosciutto, of course) and the white chocolate covered pretzels shaped like bones to the large brontosaurus cake with a menacing, toothy roar look, it was actually the menu Will had devised so many years ago for the prom.

“How the hell did you find out about all of these somewhat ridiculous menu items?” Will inquired, helping himself to a generous scoop of the fruit salad made of white grapes, melon balls and kiwi to resemble “dino eggs,” then pausing to admire the “volcano” cheese fondue display.

“There isn’t even a volcano in *Jurassic Park,*” Will laughed, “I just liked volcanos.”

“You’re my naughty little volcano, always erupting all over me,” Hannibal replied, as usual giving his most crude come-ons in the light, crisp tone that made them seem harmless, even casual.

“Oh, I’ll erupt all over you soon enough,” Will promised.

Hannibal took both of their plates and carried them to the table, then pulled Will’s chair out for him, waited for his fiance to sit, and gently pushed the chair into place, because of course he did. He leaned in to nibble his fiance’s ear, lightly tugging brunette curls as he added with hot breath, “I do think it’s going to be an enchanted evening, Will.”

Over dinner, Will had another eureka moment and asked, “My mom didn’t give you my composition book from high school, did she? That’s where I wrote out the menu– oh, God, she did, didn’t she?”

Hannibal smiled, enchanted. “Your mother was indeed generous enough to provide ample details for my research of the event. I not only had the privilege of perusing your playlists and the several menu drafts before you decided on this one…”

“Oh, God,” Will said again, laughing and blushing as he covered his face, suspecting what came next.

“But also several original poems which I found entirely delightful and –”

“They’re terrible!” Will laughed so hard he cried again, trying not to choke on the next sip of delicious bubbly champagne. “They’re the actual worst poems ever written.”

“Not at all,” Hannibal insisted, and he was partly serious, which just made it even funnier as Will’s stomach ached from laughing. “The one entitled, ‘Tear My Soul and Make Me Whole’ I found especially intriguing.”

“Mmm, the one with lines like ‘the night I saw you / my fantasy come true / I felt my soul inside me / consume and subdivide me’?” Will chortled, following his next bite of yummy buffet food with a swift sip of champagne that drained the cup.

“You were so creative,” Hannibal deadpanned, loving it when he could get Will hysterically laughing.

The boombox cd changer lightly clicked as it found the soundtrack to *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* and Bryan Adams’ song “Everything I do (I do it for you).” Will immediately got to his feet.

“Ah, my favorite! We are so dancing to this, get your butt over here, you old smoothie.”

“You’re well aware that my derriere, like the rest of me, is ever at your disposal, Will.”

Hannibal smiled devilishly at the pleased effect this statement had on Will. They danced euphorically to the song as Will sang to his heart’s content and even air-guitared for the solo before the big finale. Hannibal just went on watching him as if he was the keeper of the stars and the center of the universe. To him, Will was.

***

True to his word, Will took Hannibal on every surface in the room. The dogs had wandered off and fallen asleep in the other room after the excitement of watching the proposal wore them out. They had the prom all to themselves, so Will put the Boyz II Men cd back on with a cheeky grin and ordered Hannibal to strip down to nothing except his unbuttoned white dress shirt with the bow tie hanging open.

“Perfect,” Will smiled, yanking Hannibal against his own fully clothed form for a deep, hard kiss, biting the older man’s lip and murmuring, “Time to show my gratitude for such a special night. Know what that means, Daddy?”

“That it’s going to be not only a special night, but a long night?” Hannibal’s voice had gone and gotten very husky again, his accent slurring not from liquor but excited hope. When his voice got like that, it did things to Will that made him do things to Hannibal.

“You’re damn right, Daddy.” Will pressed his raging hard on deliberately to Hannibal’s own, while at the same time he roved his hands, tight and demanding and smooth, all the way down the older man’s broad back to cup his ass, then squeeze the soft, inviting cheeks.

“You always feel so, *so* good,” Will hissed, and he was so aroused that it almost sounded like an accusation – or maybe it was. “You’re..mmm,” he captured Hannibal’s lips in a searing kiss, then backed him with that same confident swagger right up to the buffet table. “I guess we may as well start here, shall we?”

Oh, that playful lilt in his tone, and the roguish spread of his slow, commanding smile, the way he raised his eyebrows. The way he *meant business.* Hannibal knew very well that despite the affectionately polite wording, this wasn’t a request.

Still, he might be able to get himself in enjoyable trouble with a false protest. “But Will,” Hannibal began shakily, doing his best acting, “We’ll make a mess and ruin the table display.”

Will read Hannibal's intentions as easily as he breathed. He knew what his beloved desired, and he was more than ready to play.

“Know what, I was going to take my time getting you ready, but just for that I’m going to fuck you soon and hard, use you for what I want. Turn around, present, and put your fucking leg up on the table. I want you spread open for me like the needy, *beautiful* cockslut you are, Daddy.”

Trembling with happiness that his plan had succeeded this easily, knowing they both knew it was a game and their eyes sparkled with the humor soon to turn to helpless, loud moaning and the slap of hot skin on skin, Hannibal did exactly as he was told.

“You’re all ready for me?” Will had quickly undressed and tossed his clothes aside, even his skimpy underwear (he’d have to show it off to Hannibal some other time, he was too feverishly impatient now).

He stood now in nothing but the jewelry Hannibal had given him, including the new and gorgeous engagement ring sparkling on his hand, a hand he now used to rub seductively over the flawless, smooth curves of Hannibal’s ass before spanking him hard.

“Oh, Will, please,” Hannibal begged, breathless already and clinging to the table as his ass smarted with the sting of the first few good smacks from Will’s skillful hand. “I need you so desperately.”

“*That,*” Will answered in a low, gravely tone, his curls spilling wildly over his forehead while his eyes darkened, “Is evident.”

He’d noticed the tell-tale glisten of lube on and around his fiance’s hole, and tested the theory now by gliding his index finger in halfway. Like *silk,* there was no resistance, only the eager, slippery push of his long digit into tight, perfect warmth.

“Oh, God, you’re so gorgeous, inside and out,” Will gasped.

Hannibal cried out – the sound somehow both gruff and meek, another one Will was addicted to evoking. He thrust his whole finger in deeper, then started a slow fucking motion while he leaned over Hannibal’s back and kissed him, nipping the skin occasionally with his teeth, his free hand stroking up and down Hannibal’s shaking leg, long, pretty and elegant, propped up on the table so Will could have the best possible angle to fuck him so hard and deep, he was sure to once again lose his memory of all the languages he normally had amazing proficiency in.

The only language he needed, of course, was *Will, Baby,* and perhaps *please,* so far as Will was concerned.

Hannibal had no expectation of further foreplay and none was granted; his cock dripped with pleasured anticipation, his breath quickened as Will hovered a moment, biting his neck and circling his hard, weeping cock around the begging hole.

“What do you have to say for yourself? Are you my handsome, refined, brilliant, respected Dr. Lecter to everyone else and my shameless *slut* here at home?” Will growled as Hannibal moaned a weak assent and tried to back his ass up into his lover’s cock.

“Yes, baby,” Hannibal pouted, “Now, please, Will…”

“You’re blatantly disobeying now?” Will smirked, pupils hugely dilated, mouth watering with desire. He spanked Hannibal a few more times, good and hard, then leaned over him and grasped his neck.

Throughout this process, Hannibal had continuously whimpered, “I’m sorry baby,” so fucking disingenuous that Will snarled. When the younger man wrapped a hand around his neck with a light squeeze, Hannibal’s pleas and apologies cut off abruptly. The blissed-out, tormented look on his face still spoke volumes and got Will even harder, almost in pain with the need to fuck.

“You’re not,” he accused, lining his aching manhood up at last to sink into perfect heaven where he belonged. He trembled, stroking himself to keep about as calm as he could in these circumstances. “You aren’t fucking sorry at all, Daddy, you’re a deliberate, sassy, disobedient, naughty slut who belongs to *me.* Now I’m going to remind you who’s in charge, so *clearly* I don’t think you’ll forget it.”

He let go of Hannibal’s throat and grasped a handful of soft, silvery hair instead as he sank into him in one unrelenting, firm thrust, fully seated and pressed right to Hannibal’s prostate in mere seconds.

Hannibal made a sound which defied description beyond shocked ecstasy almost on a fearful level. “Too much,” he fussed, slamming his hand on the table and trembling convulsively. “Too fast, too hard, Will. Build up, please.”

“Funny how you can be both completely honest when you’re asking for privileges you don’t deserve, and entirely fake since we both know you love it being taken rough and selfishly, don’t you?” Will pressed flush against Hannibal, his hips against the older man’s ass, cock deep as he could go. “You even feel that in your cute little tummy, don’t you, Daddy?”

“Y-yes, baby, please,” Hannibal stammered, and Will rested his chin in the crook of his fiance’s neck and shoulder, nibbling his ear, staying right where he was without thrusting in and out yet.

Will’s hands traveled all over Hannibal, breathlessly admiring, caressing his hairy chest and playing with his sensitive nipples, biting his shoulder, licking the bite mark. He lost control then, seeing the outline of his mark on Hannibal glistening and red. The sultry r&b kept playing as Will started to fuck in earnest, leaning back and grabbing Hannibal’s hips harshly. He slammed in and out mercilessly, cursing under his breath, alight with every shade of love and lust, darkness and sweetness and how right this was, would always be.

“My handsome, sophisticated Daddy,” he sighed, slowing his thrusts again as Hannibal continued to cling to the table for dear life. Tears of exertion, overstimulation and adoration streaked down chiseled cheeks to paint luscious lips. “You looked so hot in that fucking tuxedo, so perfect. Even better like this though. I’m the only one who gets to know for sure just how unbelievably…” With this, he unexpectedly, to Hannibal, started pummeling him with pleasure, rough and claiming, toying with his nipples while he went on with staggering breath, “Stunning you are, naked, undone with desire and so, fucking, *needy*…”

“Thank you, baby, but you’re the lovely one,” Hannibal answered, voice worn thin, his skin slick with sweat under his fancy dress shirt where Will gripped him and left fingerprints in the delicate skin around his hips.

“So humble all of a sudden.” Will grinned. He pulled out of Hannibal with a groan, watching his rigid cock as it came out inch by inch, euphoric at the knowledge he’d be back inside his fiance in moments. It was everything he needed.

“Turn around, lay on the table, legs up and spread,” Will ordered, watching, pleased, and stroking himself with a pleasured shiver as Hannibal obeyed.

“Yes, baby.”

The older man, with his muscular physique and smooth, tanned skin, his furry chest and adorable belly, looked incredible from this vantage point. Will got between his legs but teased him first, grasping his chin with a commanding glare.

“Why do you think you deserve more when you’ve sassed me and been so damn manipulative about getting what you want?”

Will stared him down, blue eyes blazing in a storm of pure lustful lightning only inspired and meant for one other out of every single human on the planet. No one else could make him feel this way.

“Because…I’ve said I’m sorry.” Hannibal moaned when Will slicked his cock against his hole, up and down, stroking his perineum then giving his balls a light squeeze, knowing exactly what drove the older man wild. “Oh!” Hannibal flinched in pleasure, “And – I love you, baby.”

“Mmmhmm?” Will smiled mischievously. “You do, don’t you?” He flashed the ring proudly, then slung one of Hannibal’s legs over his shoulder and bit his ankle, provoking another happy whine.

“You’ll be my husband,” Hannibal said wistfully, gazing up at Will, entirely in the younger man’s power. “I can hardly wait.”

Hannibal simply looked so gorgeous lying on the table next to the plates that had been hastily shoved to one side. His hair was askew, his tux shirt open showing off his scrumptious body, his cock was huge and dripping against his stomach. He never tried to touch it, just submitted to Will, *perfectly.*

“Look at you,” Will sighed, shaking his head.

He put Hannibal’s other leg over his free shoulder and slightly lifted Hannibal’s lower body so that his ass was elevated. Then he reached down and guided himself back inside Hannibal with a heady sigh; this angle, while a workout given that Hannibal was quite a bit bigger than him in some respects, provided a deep penetration that sent electric thrills of pleasure shooting through him with every long, fluid glide in and out.

“Oh, my God,” Will groaned, lost to the immensity of how good Hannibal felt. How he loved to hear Hannibal’s frantic breathing and his soft, vulnerable cries of “*Will*--”

“Yes, I’m here, Daddy, I’ve got you.” Will smiled adoringly and leaned down, letting his lover’s legs slip from his shoulders, getting closer now and kissing Hannibal’s mouth with slow, wet tenderness. “I’m going to take such good care of you. Would you like that?”

“I’ve never had anyone to take care of me before,” Hannibal admitted, emotion like shattered glass in his dazzling eyes.

“You do now and you always will. I know just what you need.”

Will was still so deep inside, held still there as he softly kissed Hannibal’s jaw, his ear, down his neck, and Hannibal was trying to wrap his legs around Will but he was too shaky, and there was no controlling that when Will fucked him like this. With a frustrated moan, he pouted again, reaching up to run hands through Will’s hair, even that a challenge; he fumbled and just kept saying “Will. Baby, baby, please move. Please…”

“Nobody is prettier than you when you’re begging, Daddy, and you know it.” Will grinned and slid out, but silenced Hannibal’s complaining cries by helping him to stand, barely, and wrapping him up in the warmest love.

Their naked torsos were divine together, slicked with sweat, nipples rubbing and their cocks brushing, tingles of pleasure singing through both of them. Hands wandering, Will’s knowing and strong, Hannibal’s trembling. Again he made no further move to obtain his wishes, but followed the pace set by Will.

“I want you,” Will elaborated in a throaty tone, kissing Hannibal’s mouth languorously, sucking his lower lip before adding, “Against that wall, arms above your head. Then, I’m going to sit in that chair while you ride me hard, and that’s how I want you to come. You’ll wanna come when I’m fucking you right into that wall, but you’ll hold yourself back. I know you understand, don’t you, Daddy?”

Hannibal smiled, tears shining in his eyes. He was so happy. He framed Will’s face in his hands and said, “Of course, baby. I’ll do anything you want me to. It feels so good to do what you tell me.”

He was a sight to see when he got in the next position, arms held above him and palms pressed to the wall although it was difficult when he was still trembling and needing to come so badly. Will came up behind him and without further prelude pushed back into the older man’s perfect ass, gripping the firm but soft and spankable cheeks, watching every hard inch of his reddened cock sinking all the way back in.

“Fuck. Tell me again, Hannibal. Did anyone else ever dom you? Spank you?”

He slammed in this time so hard it took Hannibal’s breath but the Ripper still panted hoarsely, “No, no, I wouldn’t let them.”

“Did you let anyone else fuck you, honey?” Will waited to thrust in again, waited for the answer that always made him feel so alive with a yearning and satisfaction all at once, with immeasurable pride and joy.

“No, Will, never. I didn’t want them to. I want you to fuck me, please, please, please,” Hannibal let out a breathy sigh and a cute, huge smile took over his face when Will grunted and fucked him into ragdoll mewls.

“So proud of you, honey,” Will purred, equally breathless.

He pulled Hannibal up flush against his body, seated to the hilt, arms looped around his Daddy’s pleasantly soft middle, roving possessively up to his chest. He bit and kissed Hannibal’s neck, then absorbed the red-faced, ecstatic mess he’d made of the dignified man, never able to have enough of this.

“I think you deserve to come for being so good, obeying me and taking your discipline, holding out even when it was really, really hard to resist coming, huh, Daddy? Wasn’t it?” Will kissed the hot, blushing face indulgently.

“Yes, baby, I believed I might faint. It’s…right there.” He squeezed his eyes shut, pretty pale lashes dripping with tears.

His cock was equally reddened with need as Will’s, precum dribbling from the hypersensitive tip. His manhood jutted out so solid and delicious that Will wanted badly to suck him, but that would make Hannibal come, and not in the way he had planned, that would be in this instance the most satisfying for them both. A culmination, Will taking his engagement present, unwrapped and devoured to excess, and Hannibal taking his gift in return. He also wanted to watch Hannibal ride him, feel the man coming undone in as close-up a manner he could achieve.

“I’m going to wake you up with the blow job of a lifetime tomorrow morning,” Will vowed, “Look at you. Jesus Christ, you’re so perfect.”

Hannibal’s eyes squeezed shut and he whispered, resting back against Will, cradled in the younger man’s arms, Will held deep inside him, “Thank you, thank you, baby…you’re the perfect one, you’re the beautiful…the most beautiful…”

“Come on,” Will urged gently, his voice gone tender and sweet, no teasing in it, only love. “Think you can walk, honey?”

A jerky nod was the reply. Will smiled and ruffled his sweaty hair. So soft, so lovely, woven through with glistening silver. All his, Hannibal, every inch was his. “Good Daddy. It’s really time, I promise.”

He pulled himself with a ragged gasp from Hannibal and sat in the chair, scooting out a little away from the dinner table. He held his arms out, clasping Hannibal’s hands when the older man walked dizzly to him.

Hannibal had a drunken smile, dazed on lust and pleasured pain of deprivation and rough sex. He climbed onto Will’s lap, bracing one hand on Will’s shoulder, big fingers warm and sweaty, sliding on Will’s own damp skin.

“Take it,” Will smiled when Hannibal lined Will’s big cock up to his relaxed and used hole. The older man looked again taken aback at the sheer size he was about to take into the tight channel of his body. “It’s yours, show me how you take what you need, Daddy. Want it?”

“Yes.” Hannibal’s lashes fluttered as he lowered himself onto Will, moaning like such a pretty, adorable whore. “Oh, *Will*-- baby, yes,” he wrapped his arms sloppily around Will’s neck, then leaned in to lick Will’s mouth, enticing.

Will gasped and met Hannibal’s kiss with a flicking out of his own tongue so that they licked each other wantonly, the very definition of wet and wild. Hannibal’s fingernails dug into Will’s upper back when his hips slid all the way down, Will back home, his aching erection pushed right to the sweet spot again.

“There it is, Daddy. Go on and show me.” He could barely breathe with the immensity of pleasure making his own orgasm harder to hold back with every second.

Will was going to blow, big time, and he could tell from how he felt that Hannibal would be dripping with seed when this was over; even with his Daddy’s ambition to keep it inside as long as possible, it was going to be way too much. The anticipation of that made his breath quicken. He tightened his hands on Hannibal’s sides and felt the up and down motion of the older man’s own skillful moves.

“You have done such a good job of learning how to ride me, honey,” he praised, the words coming apart at the seams.

“Oh, thank you,” Hannibal actually seemed to be blushing again, but his face was simply so crimson that Will had to go on tiny details of shading to be sure. How he thrived on Will’s praise, how he needed it, needed *this* to keep breathing.

His wide blue eyes stared at the god in his lap, gasping and fucking himself down on Will harder, faster, crying. Stunning.

“Close, baby,” Hannibal moaned, still depending on Will’s commands when he’d already been given permission. He was really too beautiful to be believed.

“Go on, then,” Will gritted out, unable to keep his own pleasure from building to breaking. He felt the pressure building, balls tightening, butterflies wrapped in electric tingles of bliss, waves of this anticipatory pleasure coursing through him head to toe, over and over, every time Hannibal brought the slick, tight gorgeousness of his body bearing down on Will’s dick, plush ass touching Will’s thighs, making Will lick his lips and issue another impromptu spanking. “Come for me, Daddy, I’m gonna come for you, too. *In* you.”

Hannibal moaned and nodded his obedience, fucking down so hard, so fast, sputtering out a long stream of multi-lingual curses as his hole squeezed desperately around Will and his own thick member spurted with creamy cum all over Will’s smooth belly.

“Yes!” Will praised, blown away by the hot gorgeousness in his arms, “Keep fucking going, get it, Daddy. *Yes*– Oh my god, Hannibal, fuck–”

The wave finally crested, unbearable pleasure crashing through Will, tidal-strong. His mouth fell open in shock, and Hannibal was still fucking riding him like a relentless cowgirl, and Will was going to – too much – "Don't stop," Will ordered, his voice feral when it reemerged, "So good, Daddy. Keep– oh!" He shuddered, rocked by another surge of ecstasy as Hannibal wept and finally stilled in his arms, wrapping around him needily, moaning Will's name and a thousand whimpered "baby"ies into his neck.

"Okay," Will shivered, holding him, carefully helping Hannibal to ease off of him, but keeping the older man right there on his lap in a warm, comforting hug. "You've done incredibly well, honey. So proud. My future husband."

His own big, stupid grin felt like it would never fade. He'd just walk around like this forever, high on being married to Hannibal Lecter and not caring that he looked like a besotted dork – being one made him too happy to mind afterthoughts like the outside world or appearances.

Hannibal murmured something slurry in Lithuanian, involving but not limited to "mylimasis" and "Aš tave myliu," and Will had just opened his lips to say "I love you, too," when a distinct snoring noise interrupted him.

Will cupped Hannibal's face gently in his hands and examined him. Yes, he was fast asleep. Overwhelmed with affection, he kissed Hannibal on both cheeks and murmured softly, "C'mon, sweetheart, let me help you to bed."

Hannibal grumbled and did not open his eyes. Will had really knocked him out, and he deserved no less after such a beautiful evening and proposal.

Carefully, Will managed to guide Hannibal's drowsy, heavy body from his lap and brought him down the hall to bed with slow progress. At one point Hannibal attempted to rest against the wall and go back to sleep, and Will giggled, "Almost there, Daddy, come on, now. There you go."

Hannibal tumbled unceremoniously into their bed but soon curled up on his side with a smile on his sleeping face. Will did a quick, deft clean-up job on them both with a warm, wet cloth from the adjoining bathroom, and that was the extent of the energy he had left for the night.

Hannibal was still wearing his tux shirt but it was quite mangled by Will's hungry hands. And he looked so peaceful as Will pulled the blanket up to his shoulders. He took off his necklace and bracelet, rolled back his slightly sore shoulders. Dressed only in his engagement ring, Will shivered, then opened the dresser drawer, yawning, and slipped on Hannibal's red sweater. This did complete the outfit nicely. In the morning, Will would have to ask his fiance if he agreed.

Right now, the only other favorite thing he wasn't wearing was Hannibal himself, so Will slipped into bed and spooned up behind Hannibal, snuggling contentedly. In his sleep, Hannibal made a pleased little noise and held onto Will's hand, wriggling back against him to get closer.

Will could still remember that first, awful prom night and getting stood up, cast aside like nothing, then spending the night down by the river glaring into the coursing waters and

promising himself, alone in the darkness, he'd simply treat most other people like nothing, then, and with a smile on his face. This would protect him from any more heartbreaks.

Back then, he would never have guessed that it was exactly opening himself up emotionally and being willing to have his heart broken that would someday set him free enough to experience true love.

But then again, the memory of that desolate and disillusioned young Will seemed like a story that happened to someone he used to know, someone he still regarded with nostalgic affection, but whose wounded heart didn't match his present feelings one bit. He wished he could go back in time and give his eighteen year old self a hug and an assurance that he only had to wait until his late thirties to have all of his dreams come true. Instead, he settled for briefly picturing this scene, feeling that when Hannibal put the ring on his finger, it had taken away that last trace of those old, paranoid insecurities.

He fell asleep soon after and dreamed of his beastly Ripper, his terrifying, fierce stagman, meeting him in that forest of dreams where their unconscious minds often seemed to converge. There, the stagman knelt before Will with an uncharacteristically vulnerable look about him. He stared up at Will as if he wanted to ask something very important, and in his nervousness his claws bit into Will's hands. "Yes," Will told Hannibal again, his voice smooth, soft and certain. "I'm sure. Yes, all of you, yes, forever. I've never been so sure of anything." The stagman hugged Will around the middle and nuzzled into him, still a nightmarish threat to anyone else in the world, but with Will, docile and finally at peace.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading and still being here. Next time: Will's official proposal to Hannibal and -- 🙊other things.

Fuck 'em only we know

Chapter Notes

Hi friends! Hope you enjoy the new chapter. I'm still playing with the last part to see if it will be one more chapter and an epilogue or just a longer epilogue. Either way, that will be done soon and I can't wait to finish this journey with you and our boys!

The first part of this chapter is taken from my Gold Rush Dark Timestamp, "A box in the ocean." However, you do not need to have read that piece to understand the events of this chapter.

Also for some reason the spacing did not transfer properly from Google Docs to here originally 😩 and I've had to redo all the html manually. It looks ok on my end, hopefully yours too! 🖤

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I'd run away, I'd run away

With you, would you run with me

Our life could be a little bumpy, but I'd hold on

Just wanna tell you that I see you, baby, do you see me?

Cause this is special, baby

Fuck em only we know -Banks

***

April: Several Months Later

Jack and Bella's backyard barbecue vow renewal party was a classily understated and joyous affair. As Hannibal stood beside Will, watching along with the other guests from the couple's circle of family and friends, the happy couple did a flawless tango on the wooden dancefloor under the rented bridal white tent, Jack even taking the rose from Bella's dress sleeve with a confident flair and placing it between his own lips as he gave his lovely wife a low dip at the ending note of the hot-tempoed song.

"One more second, one more inch and I was about to collapse!" Jack laughed, and Bella, who was also slightly out of breath, laid a hand on the lapel of her husband's navy blazer.

“Nobody ever would have guessed, honey,” She assured him while winking to the crowd of guests, causing merry laugher to cascade through the assemblage.

Beverly, Brian and Jimmy were engaged in their usual fast, good-natured debating over the most delicious of the appetizers on the buffet table, but Hannibal’s taste ran only to Will, the hunger of his emotions eclipsing his cannibalistic fervor, or becoming it -- still, it was difficult to ascertain that line, if it even existed.

“You’re making me blush, Daddy,” Will chided softly under his breath, kissing Hannibal’s cheek casually, his arm firmly wrapped around his lover’s waist, always marking him as his own. “Do you think I haven’t noticed you staring at me since we got here?”

“Do you think I haven’t noticed you enjoying it?” Hannibal smirked, his eyes briefly rolling up when Will shot him a saucy look that went through his layers of pride and humor like an x-ray.

He was once again exposed, as easily as Will discerned the motives of any fellow killer, but he was Will’s first and only choice, and he was learning to let that matter and heal his old emotional wounds, the child inside him crying in the snow miles away from his family’s sacked estate, bloodstains seeping into the merciless freezing slush.

“I assume you can’t stop thinking about what you have on under that cute little ‘casual’ outfit,” Will said lightly while they strolled the big, well-kept backyard with its freshly blooming vegetable and flower gardens.

A low, country-yellow painted gate led the way to a more secluded area of the Crawford’s gardens. Will opened the gate for Hannibal with courtly charm, and gestured for his lover to slip away with him, an invitation eagerly accepted; he had to smother a laugh when Hannibal almost darted through the gate towards the welcoming privacy.

They wandered on, impressed by the natural wonders which the Crawfords had cultivated in only two medium-sized garden areas, eventually stopping beneath an iron, lattice-work awning overgrown with ivy and wildflowers on purpose, to lovely aesthetic effect.

“Are you cold,” Will asked, still using his casual tone to drive Hannibal insane. There was a mild bite in the Spring breeze, but it didn't stand a chance against the blazing desire between them.

“No,” Hannibal insisted, grabbing Will by the collar of his blue and white gingham shirt and laying a smoldering kiss on his mouth, his tongue dipping eagerly inside Will’s parting lips. He tugged Will down to sit on an old-fashioned white bench with elaborately looping design on the frame and without further ado, placed his big, strong hands firmly on Will’s knees and parted them.

“My goodness, Daddy,” Will laughed, his pretty blue eyes so vivid it took the older man’s breath away. “Here? Now? What if someone sees?”

“Let them see, then,” Hannibal said without hesitation, gliding his groping, knowing hands up Will’s tan trouser-clad thighs, stroking his thumb against the hardness above and sighing

with neediness.

“Then I want to see you. In what you have on underneath.” Will gave him a very deliberately commanding look. In it, there was the unhidden truth behind his metaphor, unhindered by the lust in his own darkening gaze, the strength of his own hand deep in Hannibal’s hair ready to shove him down to work.

Will had guessed correctly that Hannibal had been hyper-aware of his undergarments since the younger man told him what to wear all day to get him in the mood for later: his naughtiest bright red lace lingerie. The shameless attire tightly hugged his muscular body under his dapper pinstriped suit jacket, white shirt and blue bow tie and slim-fit charcoal trousers that showed off his trim waist and round ass. His pants ended at the ankle and displayed his strong ankles above shining brown loafers, and of course this entire Edwardian-level fashion moment was Hannibal Lecter’s idea of casual.

“Daddy, you know I’d fuck your brains out anywhere, anytime just for what you have on on top of your secret, special little things,” Will promised, “But show me, I’ve waited long enough, too.” The bright music continued playing happily from the speakers in the adjoining garden where the Crawfords and their guests celebrated, and the vibrant tropical beats seemed an appropriate match for the mood between the murderous lovers hidden in their stolen scene of lust.

Hannibal moaned at Will’s words and slipped loose his bow tie, unbuttoned his shirt to reveal the crimson lace clinging to his body, making him feel extra sensitive. The frilly, ruffled lace negligee was technically a babydoll dress, hitched up above a skimpy red thong. Will put his groping, claiming hands on Hannibal’s ass cheeks, revealed by the mere thread of underwear between them, Hannibal’s trousers by now hanging around his thighs while he kissed Will’s lips, so hard and deep he thought they might both faint.

“Get on with it, then,” Will growled possessively, pushing Hannibal’s head down to his straining erection, freed from his pants and held lovingly in the Ripper’s skillful grip.

Hannibal swallowed him down immediately, and Will slammed his free hand down on the bench to prevent himself from shouting with the shock of pleasure occasioned by the older man’s warm, tight, enveloping lips on his rock-hard erection. And Hannibal never let up, bobbing his obedient head and slurping, sucking, kissing, licking, deep-throating as if his life depended on Will’s pleasure, nothing else mattered. Will kept pushing his head up and down roughly, fucking hard into his mouth until he filled it with a hot, salty splash of cum and Hannibal still wouldn’t stop, not until overstimulation had Will slapping his face adoringly, urging, “stop, stop, stop, you’re fucking killing me.”

The older man smirked proudly and stared up at Will, the red silky straps hanging enticingly from his broad shoulders, Will’s sticky seed still dripping from his lips.

“Look at you,” Will smiled, just as proud of him, in awe. He traced Hannibal’s lips with his thumb and slipped more cum into his mouth. “You’re as pretty as a picture, Daddy.”

He tucked his cock back into his trousers and went on caressing Hannibal’s reddened, sweet face. Drawing him into a tender embrace, Will rubbed his back. “I should take you in there

with the rest of the crowd and fuck you in your lovely nightie for them all to see. Would you like that?"

"Yes," Hannibal whimpered, nuzzling into Will's neck, "I would."

"I guess I probably shouldn't throw away my career and every friendship I've got at this this party, but let it be noted for the record that I am very tempted," Will confessed, his voice still husky with afterglow. "Get dressed again. Don't even think of taking off that red get-up until I get you home later."

Hannibal nodded, cheerfully obedient, and reassembled his person suit of elegance, slicking a hand through his hair to straighten it somewhat. He still had sex hair though, and a glow of lust about him that made Will's heart hammer.

"Red is definitely your color," he praised. "It suits you. You're so bold, you never stop amazing me."

"Nor you me, my dearest." Hannibal sat down beside Will on the bench again, asking for no release despite his engorged cock, a state of affairs which he would simply have to wait out before appearing before the other guests. They both knew it suited them -- for different reasons that yet united perfectly -- to force Hannibal to serve Will's needs and wait to have his own fulfilled.

"Now that I let you suck me off in the garden, do you think you can survive the rest of this party before I take you home and show you exactly what I think of your slutty but very good behavior and that nightie which I haven't stopped thinking about since this morning either?" Will grinned, wildly happy, so much so it scared him. He never thought he would meet his soulmate, not really, and it still threw him for a rapturous loop in such moments of complete intimacy.

"I think I can, baby," Hannibal said, very sincerely and so adorably Will had half a mind to bend him over the bench right then. But the waiting intoxicated and invigorated them both; it was going to be another very long night of fucking until dawn found them quite possibly still writhing together.

"I notice that you've been much more open with me lately," Will noted as he threaded his fingers through Hannibal's and led him back through the gate to the party proper.

Hannibal nodded, taking two flutes of champagne from a tray offered by a passing caterer. The young waitress in her pink vest had a face to match, blushing as she gave the lovers a knowing and embarrassed look. Clearly, there had been every opportunity for passers-by to catch onto his and Will's tryst in the other garden, and Hannibal's smile merely widened at the realization while he held the glass of sparkling wine up in a gesture of pleasant acknowledgement towards the waitress.

Turning back to Will, he added, "You mean since what occurred at Le Danse, and afterwards...our discussion of your fidelity. I took your words very seriously, and have endeavored not to lock you out, as you call it, ever since."

“I love that,” Will enthused, nodding with a smile at Jack, who passed them quickly on his way to oversee the grill where he’d been micromanaging the catering staff as Hannibal might have if he wasn’t so busy with Will. Even if this was their own party, Will suspected quite vainly that Hannibal wouldn’t have time to hassle the caterers to a culinary perfection he considered worthy.

“And I’ve been thinking…” he placed several raw oysters, a prosciutto-wrapped persimmon hors d'oeuvre and a grilled veggie mini-skewer on Hannibal’s plate, curating the snacks with pleasure at the obvious implication of sexual stamina. Still, his heart outpaced his libido at the moment when he added, “Someday, I’d like to take you to your home. When you’re ready.”

“You mean...to what remains of Castle Lecter?” Hannibal had taken the plate Will offered, but his fingers tightened on it now as his brow furrowed. “I have long thought never to return.”

“I think it might help you,” Will explained, gently resting his hand on the curve of Hannibal’s face and caressing his jawline. “There’s a part of you that never left, but maybe if we were there together, we could leave together. And I would love to see where you were a boy.”

“I’m perhaps more a boy here and now with you than I ever was then.” Hannibal’s face was still etched in concerned hesitation at Will’s idea. “I need to think about it, this trip home. Let you know in time.”

“Okay, sweetheart,” Will accepted, kissing his mouth and both his cheeks.

Their more chaste PDA was still shameless. Across from them, already filling their plates from the dessert bar, Beverly and Brian whistled and said “Ooooooohhhhhh!” at them like a live studio sitcom audience while Jimmy called, “I’m sorry, I don’t know these people.”

Will and Hannibal chuckled at their antics, and then the older man cast his lover a more serious gaze.

“You make me want to try,” he smiled.

Will nodded again, returning his warm look with stars in his eyes.

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Something shifted in his expression and he reached out to touch Hannibal’s elbow, stopping his fiance from carrying their plates back to their table for the moment. “Wait.” He put the plates aside while Hannibal looked at him entirely bewildered.

“What is it?” Hannibal quirked his head to one side. “I may actually need to eat something to restore my energy before making any return trips to the garden, my dear. Although my stamina is naturally formidable, even I–”

Will laughed brightly. He dipped his hand into his jacket’s inner pocket and brought out a small, smooth black gift box.

Then as Hannibal stared at him in amazement with a slow smile while tears glazed his eyes, Will dropped down to one knee right there and then, in front of the whole party.

“Hannibal Lecter,” Will said proudly, beaming up at his besotted lover, “I don’t want to wait another second before giving you this ring and officially asking you to be mine forever.”

A single chocolate curl had escaped Will’s attempt at a formal, slicked back style and fallen over his brow. The sun glistened on Will’s eyes, making them look like aqua waves of the deepest ocean, too wondrously complex for anyone but Hannibal to dive in and understand. Such dark, ghastly fathoms in his wild, violently brilliant, endlessly romantic boy, there was nowhere Hannibal preferred to be than drawing and sinking ever further into Will’s beautiful riptides.

The air smelled of fresh flowers, cold white wine and warm, clear spring. The string quartet was playing one of those silly but cute classic lite rock love ballads Will’s parents liked, that is until –

Jack’s booming voice was put to a more charming use than he usually employed it at work as he interrupted the ongoing party chatter to indicate, “Ladies and gentlemen, we have a proposal happening here!”

Will couldn’t help laughing softly. “Well, Jack doesn’t need a microphone to make everyone shut up and pay attention,” he murmured as Hannibal chuckled tearfully, still regarding him with the utmost tenderness.

Sure enough, even the string quartet paused their performance, smiling over at the stone patio where Will was patiently holding the box and Hannibal’s trembling hand.

Everyone was silent and looked at the happy couple immediately; silent except for Brian who asked too loudly, “Aren’t they already engaged?” Jimmy shushed him theatrically and Beverly whispered harshly, “*Will didn’t give him the ring yet, Hannibal only gave Will his ring!*”

“Ohhh,” Brian said, nodding while his friends glared for him to be quiet. After miming out an attempt to count baffling mathematical figures in his mind, he shrugged and enjoyed the romantic scene before their eyes while continuing to nibble on his party food.

Bella put her folded hands to her lips in surprised delight that their vow renewal had inspired another proposal.

Jack smiled warmly, still looking perhaps a little confused at how they ended up here with his best profiler marrying the man he’d hired to monitor his sanity. But he just wrapped an arm around Bella and nodded at Will in encouragement. If he was ever to behave with such recklessly public romance towards Hannibal in front of Jack, Will had chosen the right day. Will opened the ring box to show off the elegant antique band he had selected to mark Hannibal for the world to always know to whom he belonged.

“So, are you gonna make me the happiest man in the world or not?”

He'd slipped into his Southern drawl, which few besides Hannibal had heard in years. Nervous despite it all, despite anticipating total acceptance from the man he loved, Will felt the importance of this moment and the memory they were making. One to be treasured for years to come, like that of their first time making love, moving in, killing together, all the ways they found themselves intertwined, never to be parted.

Woe and blood betide anyone who *ever* tried to part them. *Forever would they hold their peace,* Hannibal thought with a certain grim satisfaction. He hoped they would have enemies, if only so he could slay them in tribute to his dark angel and consume the fools in their passionate feast of sex and death, love and obsession. He hoped there would be more who tried to seduce his boy, so that he might let them get so close to touching and claiming before he gored them horrifically, soaked his and Will's satin sheets with their remains and fucked right there. This game would not come from his own jealousy. He was learning how to believe Will would never be tempted to truly stray from him. Rather…it would be passionate possessiveness and bloodlust that drove them in the pursuit. Most of all, fun. Hannibal knew how this would excite his boy, and he shared the thrill. He did love to spoil his precious Will.

Will watched the many fluctuations of awe and bliss on Hannibal's face, felt the trembling tightness of his fiance's grip on his hand and his heart leaping in his chest.

How many proposals would it take for Will to get over the excitement of it, their own fairy tale? He could understand the pride and happiness that Jack and Bella felt renewing their vows years later.

"Will you marry me?" He whispered, stroking Hannibal's knuckles with his thumb. Seeing the older man down on his knees still made Will's own knees weak with desire and love.

"Of course, you know very well I can't say no to you, baby." Hannibal winked fondly, blushing.

He let Will slide the gorgeous black and white gold band onto his finger, then Will brought him to his feet and pressed against him, kissing his fiance's mouth with fervor roughly appropriate to the group setting (probably) – at least, this was as much as Will could hold back.

Even clutching at Hannibal's jacket, digging fingers into broad shoulders and lavishing his lips with hungry presses of his own, the fact of holding back from so much more – not slipping in his tongue, not, quite frankly, actually ripping Hannibal's clothes off to have him on the nearest table – it was *challenging.*

"I don't wanna wait," he sighed hotly into Hannibal's ear, barely able to resist mouthing and biting at the older man's jaw and neck. "Not another second."

"But Will," Hannibal mumbled confusedly, still overwhelmed by the proposal and ring, "Despite our teasing on the subject, I think it might be too disruptive to the occasion if we should follow our desires so openly–"

"No, you dork," Will laughed, drawing back from their tight hug to cup Hannibal's face. He kissed his nose, then his forehead. "I'm not suggesting public sex again," whispering,

"*Unless you want*."

He enjoyed watching Hannibal's face turn pinker before adding, "I'm suggesting that we get married right here, as soon as possible. Today."

"Really?" Hannibal's jaw dropped. "After months of attempted planning for a formal ceremony…"

"Exactly. *Attempted* planning, because we could never fully agree on a venue for any part of it that wasn't too fancy and snobby for me or two lowkey and laid-back for you. I didn't want you to compromise and you didn't want me to be uncomfortable. Let's face it, the only reason we aren't already married is that our wedding planning was nothing but bickering followed by angry sex on the floor of your library. Like…every single time." Will smirked. Some happy memories in there, for sure.

"Not every time," said Hannibal archly. "One time you also had me over the desk. And then there was the night we argued over floral arrangements and genres of bands to hire for the reception…"

"Oh, yeah," Will whispered, giggling, "You fucked me against the wall."

The applause had changed to a few whooped congratulations and an enthusiastic rendition of 'here comes the groom' from the band. Will grinned even harder.

"So what do you say?" He tickled Hannibal's belly lightly, eyes sparkling. "Everyone we'd invite is here – I just need to call my parents, have them bring the dogs, and that's it. The reverend is still here, albeit a bit wine drunk - but I'm sure he can perform the wedding okay. Jack and Bella's house is classy, formal yet relaxed. It's the…goldilocks sorta 'just right' place we've been trying with no success to figure out all this time."

"I'm amenable, mylimasis," Hannibal smiled almost humbly, shy under the heat of Will's intense love. "But perhaps we should speak with the hosts and make sure they are not concerned with us 'stealing their thunder' in any way."

"Well, yeah, we gotta go talk to them, but first I had to clear it with you, Dr. Hannibal soon-to-be Lecter-Graham."

Hannibal glowed even more, blushing and smiling like a teenager in love. He followed Will like his very most loyal and dedicated puppy, and they introduced the scheme to Jack and Bella.

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"...Then I now pronounce you husbands," the reverend finished with a slightly tipsy smile of approval. With a wink to Will, he added, "You may kiss the groom."

Will had been crying like a huge sap from the moment Hannibal walked up the aisle to him, over the long, white silk carpet which had been laid down for the earlier renewal vows under

the lovely matching tent. The guests had taken their seats up again, delighted for the most part at witnessing another joyous union on such a luscious spring day, sunny with hope.

Hannibal gave him the sweetest indulgent smile, only mildly amused at Will sputtering and sobbing through his vows. His own shining, overwhelmed gaze held so many reciprocations of disbelieving happiness that Will never doubted they felt exactly the same.

When they kissed, everyone started clapping and they heard Jack, of course loudest of all, saying “here, here!” Beverly gave a shrill whistle and an enthusiastic “Woo!”

Will’s parents were crying like saps too, so obviously it ran in the family. He couldn’t help a chortle at the image he conjured of how Hannibal’s own relatives would look if they were present, by comparison – Robertus’ glum, stern demeanor and Murasaki’s awkward resignation.

Selfishly or not, Will was glad his husband’s uncle and step-aunt weren’t among the guests, but then again, he supposed they were enjoying an ongoing privilege by continuing to breathe air. Considering both of their misdeeds, Will and Hannibal had certainly killed many others for lesser offenses.

The dogs, those who had managed to stay awake for the ceremony, barked and yipped merrily at their owner’s obvious happiness, even if the whole affair seemed like a weird reason to sit still and be quiet for an unreasonable amount of time while they had to wear those annoyingly itchy bow ties again. Thank goodness for the gourmet biscuits which his parents had brought from home to encourage and reward their obedience.

“I always cry at weddings,” Jimmy admitted, elbowing Brian, “Why aren’t you crying?” He dabbed his cheeks with his pocket square handkerchief.

“Shut up,” Zeller retorted, subtly brushing a tear of his own away and suppressing a delighted smile at the proceedings.

Beverly clasped her hands and smiled as if watching a puppy wedding. Well, Will couldn't deny that he and Hannibal were just as infatuated as two strangely innocent puppies, sopping messes of tender emotion exclusively for each other.

And Will kissed Hannibal, sweet and slow with his husband’s lightly stubbled face between his trembling hands. “How the hell did you stay so elegant and composed through that?” he demanded, laugh-crying against Hannibal’s warm, ever-ready and giving lips.

“I merely infused myself with a sense of the seriousness of the occasion,” Hannibal teased, feigning a typical “Dr. Hannibal Lecter, the renowned know-it-all” look.

“I’m so fucking annoyed with you right now,” Will chuckled, rubbing Hannibal’s back fondly.

“Then it’s official,” his husband answered nimbly, “We really are married.”

Will laughed again with his whole heart, the way Hannibal loved most to hear him laugh. Everytime it happened, the world seemed to become a better place, safe, warm, embracing. Hannibal felt euphorically calm, yet elated and driven to make the boy laugh like that every day and night. They held hands, fingers laced intimately together, and walked back down the aisle to more thunderous applause.

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Not only had Jack and Bella *not* minded having their party hijacked with a second round of nuptials, but they could not have been kinder or more accommodating. The caterers and servers had been paid extra to stay longer and make a late dinner with extra dessert and champagne, with Jack insisting (himself also a little extra generous from the wine) the grooms not pay him back a dime for it.

“It’s my wedding gift to you,” he’d insisted, clapping each of their backs in turn. “To you, Hannibal, for stealing my best profiler, and to you, Will, for making me proud by not listening to me when I tried to keep you in the field too long under the wrong circumstances. Least I can do.”

“I agree,” Bella said archly.

“Although,” Jack added hastily, “If you ever decide you’d like to return to regular field work–”

“Honey,” Bella chided, glaring in no uncertain terms.

“Listen, I don’t mind the occasional consulting job, Jack, but I’m a busy man,” Will said in a friendly but quite businesslike way, a very sauve and indeed *manly* way.

It drove Hannibal crazy, that confident attitude, the smooth lying. It seemed hotter in the tent all of a sudden, but he must steel his desires for what was certain to be hours before he was alone with Will.

Whilst stood facing their kind hosts and after a quick glance around to make sure no one but Hannibal noticed, Will supplemented his words with a nice wide grope, then a firm squeeze and light, swift, near-silent spank on his lover’s supple ass.

“*Will,*” Hannibal said under his breath in consternation. Aloud to the others, he beamed and put in, “After all, Will and I intend to begin our honeymoon at once. Our tickets for a tour of Europe are booked, beginning of course with Florence.”

“Yes, of course, doctor, I remember you mentioning it’s your favorite city in the world,” Jack recalled warmly, “How delightful.”

“You’re so reluctant to let him go, but Will here has done more than his part to make the area safe and peaceful again,” Bella praised. “He’s earned a break.”

"It's been a harrowing few months for us all -- hell, a harrowing few years for many of us here today." Jack sighed, world-weary but still allowing himself the relaxed joy of this day.

"Maybe it's about time we all found a way to unwind, forgive ourselves for that. I often think that's what Dr. Bloom would want, while hoping that wherever she is, she's doing the same."

Will smothered a laugh. Hard to relax dead and six feet under. It wouldn't take long until Alana crumbled to nothingness and simply disappeared, inconsequential beyond feeding the earth.

And he found this appropriate as he thought there must be a special place in hell for people who butted their heads in where they didn't belong and looked with lust on another person's property.

"You know what, Jack?" he lied, those old acting skills working their usual charm of earnestness. "I think you're right."

Jack might have started talking about The Chesapeake Ripper (*"incarcerated"*), The Vigilante (*"so quiet we think he must have died during an attempted attack, or simply fled to some far-off destination to begin anew"*) and of course, Cami (*"what bad luck to have one of your own students turn out to be yet another evil mind for the exhibit–"*)

But Bella avoided this by pressing on smoothly, "And who better to provide it than a doting husband? Hannibal consulted me regarding the trousseau, you know."

"Oh, brother," Will grumbled, although his eyes twinkled, "Yes, my bridal trousseau, how could I forget? It's just not a honeymoon unless I'm whisked away by this dapper vandal of my maidenly virtue to be dressed head to toe in extravagant designer clothes and marched around Europe on display."

"No," said Hannibal cheerfully, "It's really not."

"Well, it's a stunning wardrobe your fiance has composed, Will," Bella grinned.

"Thank you again most heartily for your assistance in the selection, Bella." Entirely chaste and gentlemanly, he bowed and kissed her hand. "Of course, I had to turn to one of the most elegant people I know for consultation…"

"Okay, okay, that's enough," Jack joked, "I can't compete with you in the romantic ways of courtly love, Dr. Lecter, so let us mere mortals keep what victories we gain."

"Given the attention to detail and the love poured into every aspect of this occasion," Will answered, using his champagne flute to gesture at the lovely decorations around them, "It's clear you're quite the hopeless romantic yourself, Jack."

"Only when it comes to my Bella," Jack replied proudly.

In these statements, Will was completely sincere, his heart full to bursting with adoration for Hannibal and appreciation for the friends who would witness their official union. Those who had been worthy, wise or lucky enough to survive this long.

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“Flirting with me all evening, secretly touching me in untoward ways. You’re an intolerable tease,” Hannibal chided as he and Will took to the dancefloor under a by-now moonlit sky for their first dance as husbands.

The gentle strains of “When I Fall in Love” began unfurling as Will took the lead this time. He steered his husband confidently in the dance, murmuring confidentially, “Not for much longer, sweetheart.”

“Indeed?” Hannibal inquired breezily.

“Indeed. Oh, tonight, honey, on our wedding night, rest assured I intend to be one hundred percent *untoward.*"

“But not inappropriate.”

“No. After all, you’re my husband.” Will spun Hannibal easily and dipped him, grinning down at him while the guests clapped politely.

“True.” Hannibal remained pliant and synchronized to Will’s confident lead, cheeks burning. He smiled much more openly than he usually did in public.

“I feel it’s only right to commemorate the occasion by fucking you so hard that your ass is going to be killing you on that first class flight to Florence. I want you to remember who you belong to and think of those memories in your doubtless pristine traveling suit with your fancy amenities and thousand dollar champagne.”

Will’s own smile was playful but his intentions for later obviously sincere.

Hannibal blinked rapidly, otherwise remaining casual aside from his burning cheeks. “Really, Will, must you torment me–”

“Yes.” Will smirked, raising his eyebrows. His hands on Hannibal in the formal dancing positions were warm, firm, and left no room for argument. You’ll be screaming when I’m done with you, Daddy, not knowing if it’s for more or begging to rest or both. I’ll be the one to decide, of course.”

“Will, if you do not change the subject, I’m afraid I won’t be suitable to be seen in a public place at my own wedding reception.”

Will briefly, subtly brushed his husband’s groin with his own, enjoying the soft gasp he pulled from Hannibal while groaning under his breath.

“Ahem,” he said gruffly, “You make a good point. Soooo, anyway…”

Casting around for a subject change, Will looked around the room at the guests and said, “I’m sorry we don’t have the city opera society or the crowned heads of Europe and the international chef brigade in attendance. Or, you know, whoever you would have invited to a more high-falutin’ version of this wedding.”

The Southern drawl hardly escaped Hannibal's notice. His gaze faintly registered more consternation for the teasing, subtle now but still present.

"The 'international chef brigade'?" he repeated dubiously. "I believe they were already booked solid all Spring and Summer."

The first song faded into a second tender ballad while more couples joined them in dancing.

"However," Hannibal continued, "Even the glittering assemblages of the most elite of Baltimore, Florence, Paris and beyond could not compare to an intimate occasion composed of family and genuine friends."

"That's how I feel, too."

"It's ever so sad that Dr. Bloom could not be here to join in the revelry." Hannibal leveled Will with his own type of smirk, darkly suggestive.

"Well, Dr. Bloom made some rather poor choices and mismanaged matters professional and personal to quite an extent." Will feigned a serious look and went on, "I'm afraid she had to take an extensive sabbatical, in fact."

The "sabbatical to find myself again after a stressful few months" had been announced to Jack via an email forged by Will. He had no problem slipping easily into his victim and frenemy's voice and the mannerisms of her word choices. It was quite convincing; he almost had himself believing she was practicing her chakra or whatever people do when they go searching through remote locations for *themselves*.

"A pity," Hannibal sighed. He kept in perfect step with the melody while adding mischievously, "You're a very jealous and possessive man, Will. And so short-tempered." He tsked.

"You're one to talk!" Will scoffed, "At least we got a little bit of decent dancing lessons in before you offed the instructor. Now we can't go back there, it's just weird."

"Substitute instructor," Hannibal quipped in response to his husband's whispered accusations. "Perhaps he would have done better to keep his hands to himself and his admiring words unspoken, darling."

"Perhaps Alana would have done better to spare me her merciful confrontation or, what's worse, rubbing your almost-affair in my face when I was in no mood."

"They bring it on themselves," Hannibal replied with a saintly sigh. "Your student Camille, for example, now that was a particularly egregious case."

"That one was much better because we did it together," Will recalled. "That's how we'll do everything from now on."

"Yes, my dear." Hannibal gave him a very tender look at the memories of his own disappearance and kidnapping, his life at risk while under Cami's vicious supervision.

Consoling Will, he gave him a soft kiss on his forehead.

“Love you,” Will sniffed, to which Hannibal murmured a sentimental reply of the same. “I can’t start bawling again…let’s talk about something else, like…”

Will smirked again and added, “You realize that the quartet will be done in a bit, and then the ‘d.j.’ arrives.”

“You didn’t warn me that the Crawfords hired a d.j.”

“Don’t look so pale, Hannibal. Yes, they had already employed him prior to the unexpected but glorious marital professions…” he enjoyed using a ‘Hannibal-like’ florid vocabulary that made his husband give him a very husbandly look of adoring annoyance.

“And Jack paid them extra to stay till midnight. But, look: most d.j.’s for these types of events are really quite good at what they do, so don’t worry.”

“Oh, but I do worry, Will. More of Ms. Spears or Mr. Joel I am prepared to tolerate, but beyond that…”

Will pondered this. “Hmm. I guess you can also look forward to some typical wedding songs. Like…*do you remember? The 21st night of September?*” He sang quietly, not interrupting anyone else’s enjoyment of the current song from the quartet.

“I could listen to you sing anything, apparently, my dear.” Hannibal rolled his eyes but remained otherwise serene.

“And of course, the Electric Slide is mandatory,” Will elaborated, enjoying the look of smug disapproval this evoked.

“I’m sorry?”

“The macarena,” Will suggested, still looking both cheerful and quite pleasantly looking forward to the upcoming music and dance.

Hannibal’s dark look got even darker. He scowled. “You cannot be serious.”

“Oh, I’m totally serious, husband. Ah! And I almost forgot, they’re sure to include the Chicken Dance.”

“*What*?"

Chapter End Notes

Poor Hannibal, but nothing can really knock him off the cloud he's on now 😄🥰

I just launched my (thing that I can't talk about on AO3) and would love for you to check it out for new Hannigram content I'm super excited about! You can find the info on the pinned tweet on my Twitter, https://twitter.com/earthsickwoyou
or the pinned post on my tumblr: https://earthsickwithoutyou.tumblr.com/

Thanks so much!! ❤️❤️

Epilogue: Hannibal, shut up

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Sometimes I wonder, do I love you too much?

Then I tell myself Caroline, shut up

Cuz there's only one way, one way to find out

if it ever gets better than right now" -Caroline Polachek

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Hannibal had described Lithuania, and his family's country in particular, as having "a certain grim, natural beauty, like scattered jewel tones on darkest mist," and Will had to agree.

They'd toured many countries in Europe, enjoying every highlight to the fullest, drinking in history and art, dining on anyone who annoyed them, making love in risky famous places and in the finest, most decadent hotel rooms. The meals, whether of the exquisite and varied cuisines of the poshest restaurants, or of Hannibal's extravagant cookery, were rich with flavor and the juices of life.

Everything about their love and their honeymoon was bold and alive. But something went dead in Hannibal's eyes when he spoke of his homeland. At Will's gentle suggestion, he had agreed that they would (briefly) visit his family's properties, mainly as Hannibal did wish to pay homage to Mischa.

Will hoped that going back to the beginning with a loving husband by his side would help Hannibal to put the last pieces together of recovering (to whatever extent possible) from his horrifying childhood trauma and from those pieces make a peace that would soothe his soul. That perhaps stepping on that land and gazing at those places, now knowing himself completely safe, loved, and with a full life of joy ahead, would provide much-needed healing.

But when they got off the plane and Hannibal looked withdrawn, pale despite the healthy tan of a summer in Florence, Paris, Barcelona, Amsterdam and Prague, Will was worried he might have gone too far wanting to bring his husband back here. He wanted to bring relief, not trigger anything that would make Hannibal's wounds bleed more profusely.

Will could only tell himself that if Hannibal appeared too upset, he'd wisk him away at once, apologizing profusely for being wrong, and he would bring his husband to some gorgeous, amazing place they hadn't hit on the itinerary yet, wine, dine, and love all his troubles away, give him all of his favorite treats until he was better, smiling his real, deep smile again.

They made a quick stop at Robertus' estate first. Will, in one of the only strains of amusement he'd conjured since they got in their rented luxury vehicle and drove through vast

and melancholy country to the fine old mansion, had looked somewhat forward to gloating. He didn't mind a chance to rub the marriage in Murasaki's face or shove his wedding rings in Robertus' face so the Grand Duke knew that Will Graham was indeed Count Hannibal's consort, now honorary nobility. *Ha, take that, you mean son of a bitch.*

So he was slightly disappointed when their polite, perfunctory attempted visit, since unannounced in quiet revenge for Robertus' habit of the same, found the couple not at home. The servants gave Hannibal free rein of the place, so he and Will took a turn around the gardens. All the sights made Will keep thinking in contrasting descriptions like "sadly lush" and "gorgeously miserable." Jesus, what a place to grow up.

He'd heard, and even read, for his own educational purposes, slash total obsession with Hannibal, that Lithuania boasted many beautiful and comparatively cheerful experiences, from lively cities to prettily serene rustic locales.

But Robertus Lecter's looming mansion looked down its nose at them like a dark, disapproving specter. The gardens were filled with dark flowers and vines, and the winding path under a cloudy sky did not so much beckon as provide a reminder why Hannibal disliked the place.

"Don't worry your lovely head about it, mylimasis," Hannibal smiled, looking sadly lush and gorgeously miserable. He held it in and summoned bravery for Will, who wanted Hannibal to do this for himself. "I do feel a certain measure of closure, which…"

He trailed off, hand in hand with Will at the other end of the garden they'd walked through to end up near the car again.

"What is it?" Will smiled curiously, putting his sunglasses on top of his slicked-back curls.

"The terrace," Hannibal answered, "Or, I suppose you might call it a patio, which Robertus calls 'an insulting American label.' It's rather small to be called a terrace. At any rate, he has never been able to stop trying to improve it."

He nodded over at some workmen who were busily engaged in ripping up earth on one side of the house, where the yard held a nice space that caught the few rays of sun that misted through the clouds. A perfect spot for an outdoor meal or lounging, except that Robertus had torn it all apart again.

Hannibal's face lit up with a complicated expression as he suddenly darted forth to the area where the men were working, shoveling and chattering in their native tongue. He introduced himself and asked a question, all of it in way too fast Lithuanian for Will to catch the translated meaning.

The main workman nodded and Hannibal stepped unceremoniously into the big hole in the ground that looked too much like an open grave for Will's comfort. This place really was freaking creepy. He walked closer and peered down into the hole to see Hannibal looking around like this was his old teen bedroom.

“Um, what are you doing, sweetie?” Will called down. He bent his head, making curls flop on his brow as his sunglasses fell on his nose.

Hannibal looked up as if Will was the sun. Very handsome and dashing himself in a simple short-sleeved navy polo shirt tucked into fitted tan trousers, Hannibal smiled softly. “I’m admiring the view, for a moment.” After making Will blush, he climbed the ladder this time to get back out, having of course accomplished the initial goal of not doing anything unless it was in some way extra and melodramatic.

“And,” he said, only briefly winded, “I’m retrieving something I threw down there nearly thirty years ago.”

He thanked the workmen and walked back to the car with Will, handing him a small object which had been wiped clean from the worst of the dirt. It was a gold ring, with maroon swirls and in the center a large black cursive “L.”

“Your family ring?” Will asked, “Why did you throw it away? It’s beautiful. It’s your legacy.”

“Actually, you’ve just summed up the reasons,” Hannibal explained primly. “You may have it, my dear. A shame to let it languish in such a restless grave.”

He put his own darker sunglasses on, then opened the passenger side door for Will, nothing more added.

Will put the ring on his right hand thoughtfully. There was more to this story.

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Deeper into the mystery of Hannibal’s past they found Castle Lecter standing tall and proud, gaunt black towers at the center of what seemed like countless acres of overgrown and tangled, neglected land.

The neglected garden had a certain charm to it that Will liked much better than Robertus’ pretentious display. It was natural, it belonged to the mood of the formerly happy family home, the place of such tarnished glory. Robertus ignored the place and spent not one penny to restore it, which Hannibal attributed to a strange mingled jealousy and grief for his dead brother. Fog clung to the tall grass and swirled up a trellis on the side of a smaller but still magnificent house which Hannibal told him had belonged to the main servants. The trellis was overgrown with wild roses, and Hannibal picked one, staring down at it in his hand.

Blood red petals, glossy and soft, reflecting the maroon shade of Hannibal’s eyes as he handed the rose to Will with a gentlemanly bow. “For you, my darling. These roses were Mischa’s favorite. I hope she is happy that the years of neglect haven’t managed to tarnish their eager growth. And there, the bilberry bushes.”

He strode over to a big mass of wild berries, showing them to Will acting more like a tour guide now. His mood had slightly perked up. “Mischa loved these, too. We would gather them in baskets, then make a picnic in our favorite secret place, eat them with sugar and wash them down with milk. We made up a kingdom and many characters of diverse wickedness

and heroism, and there was always much for us to do. My whole life has seemed quiet since then, until you, Will."

"Show me the place you used to go?" Will asked tenderly.

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Lecter Castle had its very own immense and foreboding fairy tale forest, and Hannibal led Will through it expertly, around the twisted old trees and over the damp grass and mud.

"This is it," he said finally, as Will was cringing at a noise from an animal who had scittered past them and disappeared in a blur.

"It's only a fox," Hannibal assured his husband, stealing a warm kiss. "I'll protect you if need be."

"As long as there aren't any wolves, I'm fine," Will smiled, "But you can take care of me anyway."

"Always." Hannibal kissed his hand, smiling as well at the way Will had tucked the rose into his front shirt pocket to show it off. He patted Will's cheek thoughtfully. "You could not look more beautiful to me at this moment."

"And you," Will said with a lump of emotion in his throat.

They kissed again, Will's arms wound around Hannibal's neck, Hannibal's hands placed attentively on Will's low back. Their touches were gentle and calm, their kiss full of commitment and adoration.

"This really is stunning," Will said when they pulled back.

It was a clearing where a perfect circle was formed by surrounding trees. The sky was revealed between the treetops as if this was a natural observatory. A tall, pale tree which must have fallen many years ago was long since bound into the ground lying down, prettily curved and shaped in one place exactly like a seat for two.

They sat there and smiled, fingers loosely threaded and dangling between them.

"I hope it was okay to ask you to come here," Will said softly. "I wanted to help you to heal. It's also been remarkable and unforgettable to see where you're from. I feel closer to you here."

"Then I'm glad." Hannibal bumped their shoulders, then put an arm around Will, who snuggled closer and put his head on Hannibal's upper arm, sighing.

"Well, we didn't come here for me."

"All that I am is for you," Hannibal answered with perfect certainty. "It's for you I want to be a better me. For you, I want to make peace with the past."

“What do you want for yourself?” asked Will, kissing his shoulder.

“You.” Hannibal chuckled and his hand on Will’s waist tightened slightly. “Only you.”

A few moments of pensive silence passed and then Hannibal added, “I’d like to wear my ring, I think. If you do not mind…”

“I was hoping you’d ask.” Will took the Lecter crest ring from his pocket. He had cleaned it more thoroughly in the car on the ride to the castle.

The gold in the ring shone, sun having broken the clouds overhead with more definitive intent, summer remembering to visit this lonely place for the first time since they had arrived to find unseasonably cold air.

“The maroon colors in this look just like your eyes,” Will pointed out, sliding the ring onto his husband’s right hand.

Hannibal held his hand out and looked at it before giving it one of his familiar “Well, this has happened” looks.

“What will you do about this place?” Will looked around.

The clearing seemed to hold them like a hug. They were inside a secret and Will was the only one Hannibal would bring to this place. They were one and the same, so he could venture safely there, and with trust.

“My uncle wouldn’t care, except for mild complaints of my foolish whims, if I restored the castle and grounds, even if we chose to live here and challenge him for the role of most distinguished local noblemen. But I don’t think any of that interests me. I think I’d like to leave it like this, sleeping.”

“Do you think she’s sleeping?” Will’s eyes were sweet and encouraging, and Hannibal kissed his cheek affectionately, gratefully.

“I think she’s dreaming,” he replied, resting his cheek on the top of Will’s head, smelling his curls. “And I think she sees us in her dream, here in this place.”

“That’s a beautiful thought.”

“Yes.” Hannibal smiled at him, true relief shining in his eyes.

The Lecter ring gleamed on his hand as more clouds parted, and the diamonds on both their wedding rings sparkled. Their knees touched, Will’s heart still skipping a beat at how beautiful Hannibal was, more so every day. They were closer every day.

“And it’s enough for me,” Hannibal finished, having deeply considered the matter. “Thank you, Will.” He stroked a few tears from Will’s cheeks and they laughed gently, kissing.
“Where will we go next?” Will asked, “Back to the States? Cause some more trouble there, or…”

“Perhaps, eventually, if the mood strikes,” Hannibal shrugged. “First, I’d like to take you to Greece. The waters there are a striking color which *almost* rivals your eyes. You were certainly meant to be spoiled and ravished there.”

“Smooth,” Will winked. “Sign me up for that -- It sounds perfect, but you know I’d follow you anywhere.”

He fastened the buttons on Hannibal’s jacket because it still wasn’t warm in the forest, and he, too, would take care of his lover, always. Hannibal accepted the protective gesture as he had let Will in past all of his defenses that first night in his library, kissing on the piano bench, the passionate night in the motel room, and every day since.

Will’s vivid eyes were fixed on Hannibal’s smiling face, that one smile Hannibal had when the happiness he felt was so overwhelming he could barely hold himself together. Will’s own heart matched the sentiment, and he was glad they had come to Lithuania, after all.

“And I, you,” Hannibal replied fondly. “You know, they often say that monsters don’t get to have happy endings.”

“Do they?” Will snuggled his husband, sighing. “Well, I’ve got something better for you. We don’t need a happy ending. This is our *happily ever after*.”

Chapter End Notes

This story, and your support of it, have meant the world to me. Thank you so much. ❤️

End Notes

Thanks for reading! 🖤

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